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JUNE 2002

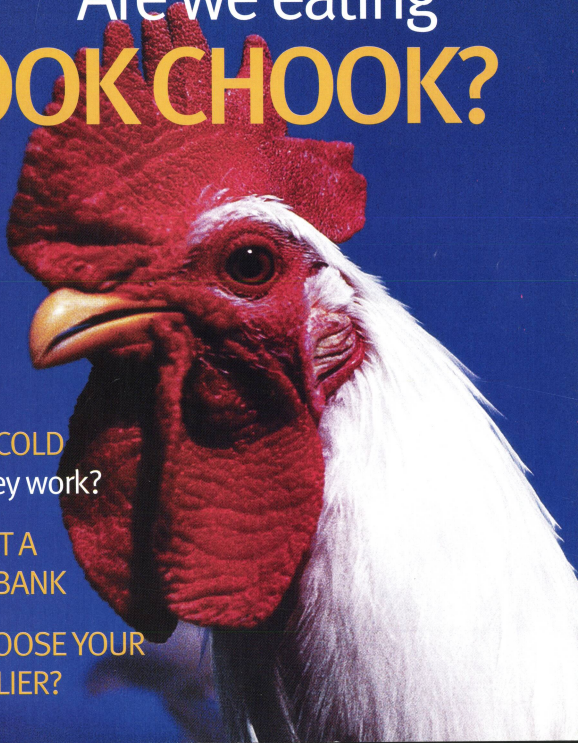
CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

Tests

DISHWASHERS
MICROWAVE OVENS
DISPOSABLE RAZORS
RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES

Are we eating CROOK CHOOK?



ALTERNATIVE COLD CURES: do they work?

HOW TO START A COMMUNITY BANK

READY TO CHOOSE YOUR POWER SUPPLIER?

Jane Mackenzie
Editor

Choosing a product made easier

There are 23 dishwashers to choose from in our test starting on page 38. Last month we reported on 29 washing machines. While our tests can tell you which models work the best, you can't easily reorder our performance tables to show you which ones with high scores also suit your other needs: models, say, that have low running costs, work quietly and will fit into the space you have available.

That's where CHOICE's website comes in. Websites have one major advantage over paper: they can be interactive. You can type in your own preferences and the website will display the models in the order that matches what you're looking for.

CHOICE Online can do this for several products with an overwhelming number of models on the market: fridges, washing machines, dishwashers, compact cameras, mobile phones, electric heaters. The list can include models CHOICE hasn't tested as well as those it has. If, for example, the only dishwasher that will fit in your kitchen is a slimline, CHOICE Online can give you details of models available even though we haven't tested them.

You can also compare models of new and used cars online, and financial products such as bank fees and managed funds. We've even got a Wine Selector: if sparkling wine or riesling is your drop, it'll pick out the best in any given price bracket among the dozens tasted for *The CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2002*.

As a magazine subscriber, don't feel you're missing out. If you're a personal subscriber (not a company or institution) you can have free access to CHOICE Online for a limited time. Just call us on (02) 9577 3399 and tell us your email address, and we'll make you a member. How do you find the guides? On the home page, click on 'Tools and shortcuts' in the bar at the top, then on 'Toolkit', then look for the product you want.

These interactive, comparative product guides aren't just a useful means of finding your way through dozens of models. They're also fun: find out just how many of your preferences you can find in any one model, or even whether the model you've already bought is one the selector chooses for you. Better still, use it to find out *before* you buy.

Jane Mackenzie, Editor

CHOICE

is published by the Australian Consumers' Association

YOUR LETTERS

We welcome the letters you send us — please always include a daytime telephone number so we can contact you quickly if we want to follow up your letter. We're sorry we can't answer every letter we receive, but we do use them in our research. Thanks for taking the time to keep in touch.

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Cover : Corbis Images

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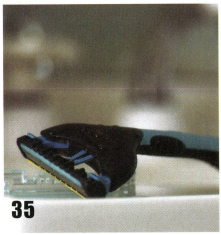

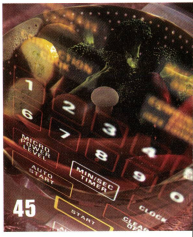

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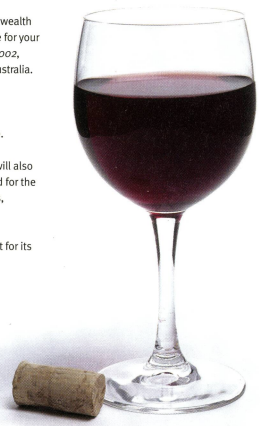
For a limited time, personal CHOICE subscribers can have free access to **www.choice.com.au**. Just call (02) 9577 3399 and have your email address ready. You can get model recommendations based on your personal requirements, do quizzes, order books and much more.

Wine online

Buying wine online is one of the most popular internet retail services, but there's also a wealth of sites around that compare wines, give tasting tips and help you choose the right wine for your meal. The following recommendations are taken from *The CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2002*, which has tasting notes and recommendations for over 400 of the best-selling wines in Australia.



VANESSA MARSHALL

Australian wine articles and tasting notes

- **www.choice.com.au**

CHOICE Online evaluates selected wines. Go to 'Lifestyle & Leisure' from the home page.

- **www.winepros.com.au**

WinePros is one of the best sites for wine recommendations, reviews and articles, and will also sell you the wine. You'll find good information on overseas wines and wineries too. Head for the directories section for information on wine education, auctions, sales, tourism, wineries, accommodation, wine clubs and more.

- **www.winexwired.com**

WineX is a magazine you can buy from a newsagency, but its website is also worth a visit for its reviews and hip attitude. There's a US and an Australian version.

Overseas wine articles and tasting notes

- **www.nytimes.com/pages/dining/index.htm**

New York Times wine on the web has articles, reviews, travel, food matching and more.

- **www.robertparker.com**

The Wine Advocate newsletter site — home of influential wine guru Robert Parker. Wine reviews with point scores out of 100.

- **www.winespectator.com**

Wine Spectator is a good site with plenty of information on what's hot in the world of wine. Reviews, ratings, articles, opinion and lists of the world's best wines for the year.

For more information on sites for buying wine online, the science of wine, the wineries themselves and our special wine selectors to help you choose a tasty drop, go to www.choice.com.au and type 'wine' in the search box on the home page.

To buy *The CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2002*, just fill in the order form on page 34 or call us on (02) 9577 3333. And *Computer* CHOICE, May/June 2002, has an even more extensive list and appraisal of wine websites. To subscribe, see page 49 or phone 1800 069 552.

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

GOOD NEWS FOR BAR FLIES?

According to *www.newscientist.com*, getting drunk couldn't be easier, now Japanese researchers have developed a 'clever glass' that knows when it needs a refill. A microchip senses when your drink gets low and alerts the waiter, using an adaptation of the electronic tag technology for deterring shoplifters. No more falling over on the way to the bar...

POWER DRILLING?

Germany's *Test* magazine illustrates a power drills report rather creatively — under the headline 'Dearer models ahead by a nose'.

PIERCING COLD

If you have facial piercings, take your studs and sleepers out before you hit the ski slopes this winter, reports *Test* magazine from Germany. Otherwise the metal can cool and damage surrounding tissue. Temperatures below –10°C are dangerous — and easily reached, even in Oz (wind chill!).

One spaghetti napolitana, thanks, doc!

Recent studies suggest that eating lots of tomatoes and tomato-based products may help protect men against prostate cancer. One such study, reported in May's *CHOICE Health Reader*, found that men who ate tomato-based pasta sauces at least twice a week were 23% less likely to get prostate cancer than men who ate them less than once a month.

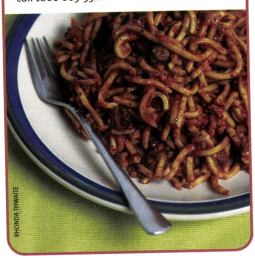
The magic ingredient is thought to be lycopene, an antioxidant that may help the body by protecting it against damage caused by free radicals. While it's found in other red foods, such as watermelon, tomatoes are particularly rich in lycopene. Other studies have suggested the link with protection is strongest with cooked and tinned tomatoes and tomato products.

It certainly can't hurt to eat more tomatoes, either fresh in salads or on toast, in pasta sauces or even as tomato paste on pizzas.

Also in this issue of *Health Reader*:

- Physiotherapy seems to be a better long-term treatment for tennis elbow than corticosteroid injections.
- With the male contraceptive pill just around the corner, the question is, will men want to take it? According to one survey of Australian men, most (about 75%) are at least willing to consider it.

If you'd like to subscribe to *Health Reader*, call 1800 069 552.



BRONCA TYMATE

SHOPPING RIGHTS FOR REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

STORECHARTER — A SERVICE CHARTER FOR STORES SERVING REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

You'd probably be horrified by the idea of leaving a debit card (keycard) and/or PIN number, social security cheque or bank passbook with a retailer as security for credit. However, it's not uncommon practice in many rural and remote indigenous communities, where it's often called 'book up' or 'book down'.

Book-up systems of credit can trap users in a 'payday lending cycle', where at least part of each new pay cheque is already owed. They're also open to abuse — for example, an Aboriginal Legal Aid Service helped a client recover $2000 wrongfully deducted by a taxi driver using a keycard.

Often, indigenous use of financial services occurs in the context of specific cultural practices and attitudes, such as a pattern of sharing that can allow third parties to run up debt. Other problems with book-up may include tying consumers to one store, imposing extra costs, or exploiting prices in a captured market.

Despite this, not all instances are a problem, and for many indigenous people it's regarded as essential to their well-being, as the only option for credit.

In the interests of protecting the shopping rights of consumers in remote and indigenous communities, the Consumers' Association recently signed on to support *Storecharter* — an initiative from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) that was launched at an indigenous consumer protection workshop in Alice Springs in April.

Owners, operators and staff of stores that display the *Storecharter* logo make a voluntary commitment to provide basic standards of service to customers, such as:

- To treat them "fairly and honestly".
- To respect their "rights and culture".
- To display prices and give receipts when asked.
- To ensure goods are "fit for sale and do what they are supposed to".
- If credit's offered, to keep clear records to which consumers have access (and not require PIN numbers for security).

Stores in rural and remote areas play an important role within communities, and *Storecharter*, developed after consultation with indigenous, government, business and consumer groups, aims to help people serving indigenous communities to comply with relevant laws, plus to encourage higher trading standards and promote further development of understanding and respect between store owners, operators and staff, and indigenous people.

The charter isn't mandatory, but we think it's a good start because it gives remote communities access to clear information about their rights and responsibilities.

Australians all have the same rights to goods and services, and although the charter is mainly intended for stores serving indigenous communities in rural and remote Australia, it can be used by any store. To order a copy, email storecharter@accc.gov.au or call 1300 302 502.

If you have a question about your shopping rights, call CHOICE Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3399 or email ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

USER GUIDE TO FINANCE BROKERS

When you need a loan for a house, car or some other big outlay, does the prospect of trawling through dozens of loan products to find the best deal seem just too hard?

In the last few years, more and more mortgage and finance brokers have entered the market, offering to do the work for you. Some of the more common services they advertise include:

- Comparing a number of loan products to find you the best deal.
- Negotiating better interest rates.
- Saving you time and money.
- Securing credit for you if mainstream credit providers have turned you away in the past.

Using a broker can take much of the hassle out of finding the right loan. But it isn't always smooth sailing, and some brokers aren't nearly as helpful as their glossy ads suggest. If you're thinking about using one, there are a few things you should know first:

- Some brokers don't charge consumers, instead being paid a commission by credit providers, while others charge a fee. Make sure you know which type you're using. You need to feel confident they're acting in your interests, not their own.

For example, some brokers may not compare a very wide range of available loan products, so ask which products they'll be comparing when they start making loan inquiries on your behalf.

- Consider whether any fees charged seem reasonable for the service being offered. Fees may be payable upfront or upon completion of the service (although upfront fees aren't allowed in the ACT, NSW, Victoria and WA). In either case, ask for confirmation in writing, setting out the following:

— All fees and charges and when they're payable.
— The amount and type of loan.

ROBYN HART

— The interest rate (or range of interest rates) applicable.
— The term of the loan.
— The frequency and amount of repayments.

- Read any document you're asked to sign very carefully, making sure you understand it. If you have any doubts, get independent legal advice.
- If the broker secures you a loan that meets the requirements set out in an agreement with you and you decide not to accept it, you'll probably have to pay the broker's fee regardless.

If you have any concerns about a broker you're thinking of using, contact the consumer affairs or fair trading department in your state or territory to see whether any complaints have been lodged against them. For more information and advice, contact the ASIC infoline on 1300 300 630.

At the end of the day, you don't want to be stuck with a loan you can't afford, that doesn't suit your needs or has an interest rate that isn't competitive. Even if you've decided to use a broker, it's worth doing some homework yourself to be confident you're really getting the best deal around.

ACCC: Internet no excuse for sloppy trading

The risks of buying online were highlighted by the recent case of NSW-based bicycle importer and internet retailer Easybuy.com.au (trading as Bikes Direct) — a company with no shopfront, which advertised bikes on TV and on its website, then delivered them to customers by courier.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) alleged that in late 2001 www.bikesdirect.com.au misled consumers about some of the rights they're entitled to under the Trade Practices Act, plus sold imported bikes that didn't comply with the mandatory consumer product safety standard. Bikes Direct has entered into enforceable undertakings with the ACCC to stop misleading consumers and to recall the faulty bikes.

It corrected information about consumer rights and warranties on its website after being approached by the ACCC. It also tested all bicycle models for compliance with the mandatory safety standard, finding failures in some areas but no major structural faults. It's now implementing a recall/rectification program for past purchasers, and will implement a trade practices compliance program for the next three years.

"Because internet customers can't personally inspect goods or services, there's a greater obligation on internet traders to ensure that their website is accurate," ACCC Chairman, Professor Allan Fels, said. "This is especially so when that website is the only source of information on those goods or services.

"Importers should also note that they have a high onus to be vigilant in ensuring that goods they import comply with mandatory Australian requirements such as consumer safety standards. It turned out that in this instance the defects were not life-threatening but the importer wasn't to know that at the time."

For information on online shopping, from credit card safety to what to look for in general or how to get a better deal, go to www.choice.com.au, type 'online shopping' into the search box on the home page and pick the articles you're interested in. Or go to www.dcita.gov.au/shoponline (the website of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts) for more on *Shopping on the Internet: Facts for Consumers.*

yourletters

This month brings some insurance gripes.

Twice the excess

On December 28 last year I broke my left little toe. Unfortunately it was a bad fracture, so I had to have two wires put into the toe to keep it in place. The operation took place in a private hospital, and I was told to come back four weeks later to have the wires removed.

When I returned to the same hospital on January 25, I was told I had to pay my health insurance excess once again, although this procedure was merely a follow-up from the first operation rather than a 'new complaint', as I tried to explain. But apparently because it was more than seven days since I was last admitted I had to pay the excess again.

I was in hospital for two hours and spent 10 minutes thereof in the operating theatre. When I went home, I felt I'd been ripped off by the health fund — and on top of the extra excess is also the doctor's gap, of course.

I believe the 'seven-day policy' is the same with all the health funds and I certainly understand why they stick to their guns when questioned, as profit often speaks louder than happy customers. As everybody knows, a broken bone doesn't heal within seven days.

I'm sure a lot of policyholders have been surprised when they came back to hospital after four to six weeks to have plaster or, as in my case, wires removed and were faced with this second excess.

Well, I've learned my lesson and if I ever get into a similar situation, I think I'll be using the public system at least for the second procedure.

Inger McCulloch
Via internet

The insurer in question confirmed that Ms McCulloch's policy carries an excess for day surgery in hospital. Other policies that don't charge the excess in these circumstances are usually more expensive. It also told us the 'seven-day rule' was common across the industry.

In our regular health insurance evaluations we've always considered and weighted any excess charges and conditions. Watch out for our latest update in next month's issue.

Outsourcing loss assessment

I'd like to bring to your readers' attention my experience in dealing with a claim with one of your top-rated home insurance companies.

The company outsourced its loss assessment to an outside group. In fact, all communications and money have to go through this outside group. The company didn't appear to want to be involved with its customer, and the loss assessor's attitude was less than helpful, even insisting that only its own tradespeople be used and no paperwork or quotes be sighted. One could wonder what deals are going on there.

Is this a trend that insurers now want to stand behind front entities and not associate with their insured clients? Something to ask your insurer next time your policy comes up for renewal.

Graeme Tipping
Via internet

Some companies do outsource, so it's worth checking when you next take out or renew a policy. And if you need advice on how to make a successful claim, stay tuned. We're looking at the experiences of consumers who've made claims recently and will pass their lessons on to our readers later in the year.

THUMBS UP

"In times when contemporary service is often not up to expectations, I think **RHEEM (SOUTHCORP)** can take a well deserved bow," says Roger Burbage of Como, WA. When he found his electric water heater in urgent need of replacement one very chilly morning last year, it took just 4½ hours for the job to be done, including the initial phone call, a visit from a representative to provide a quote and installation by a plumber.

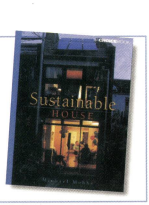
Liana Wynne of Coolangatta, Queensland, awards a thumbs-up to **HANIMEX**, which replied within a week with an apology and compensation to her complaint that some of the video cassettes she'd bought weren't four hours long, as stated.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Inger McCulloch, receives *Sustainable House*, or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 32 to 34.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.



Are we eating CROOK

Food industry practices are contributing to the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Essential life-saving antibiotics are becoming less effective as bacteria become resistant to them. Today we're faced with a number of infectious bacteria that are resistant to almost all known antibiotics.

Although misuse and overuse of antibiotics in human medicine are by far the main causes of the rise in antibiotic-resistant 'superbugs', antibiotic use in food-producing animals is a contributory factor. It's their use as growth promoters in intensively reared animals (mainly chickens, pigs and feedlot cattle) that's being questioned in relation to the part this plays in the development of bacteria that can't be killed by antibiotics.

We checked for the presence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in chicken to see if it's really a problem. The results suggest that it is (see *Chooks on test*, far right).

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

We checked chickens bought from supermarkets for the antibiotic-resistant bug vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE).

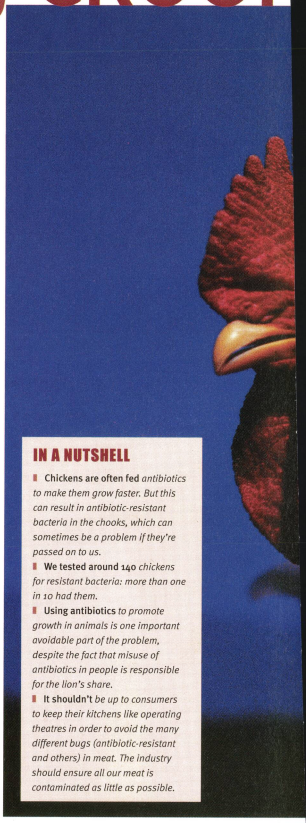
VRE is particularly a problem in hospitals, as vancomycin is often used there as a last line of defence to treat infection. If you have VRE, the bugs usually sit in your body quite happily doing no damage — if you're healthy and stay that way, there's no problem. But if you have to go to hospital for invasive surgery, for example, or if you're already seriously ill, that's when even more serious problems can arise.

If you get some kind of infection you'll be given antibiotics to treat it, and they'll kill off all the bugs except those that are resistant. And VRE, being resistant to almost all antibiotics, can then flourish and invade your body to become life-threatening.

So doctors are being faced with this double whammy: patients who are already very ill with life-threatening diseases become infected with VRE — and for some strains of it, the only effective antibiotics are experimental.

One cutting-edge antibiotic, linezolid, was given rapid approval in both Australia and the US to be used against VRE. But once you start using an antibiotic, the bugs start to wise up quickly, and sadly cases of resistance to even this new drug have already been reported in the US.

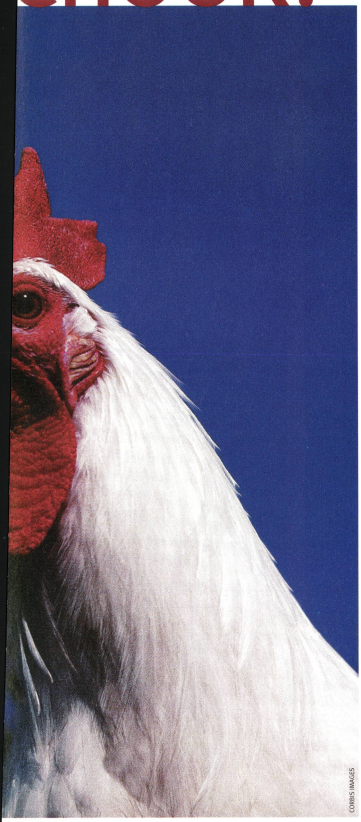
A link between some cases of VRE in humans and in animals has been shown in Europe, though the vast majority of human



IN A NUTSHELL

- **Chickens are often fed** *antibiotics to make them grow faster. But this can result in antibiotic-resistant bacteria in the chooks, which can sometimes be a problem if they're passed on to us.*
- **We tested around 140** *chickens for resistant bacteria: more than one in 10 had them.*
- **Using antibiotics** *to promote growth in animals is one important avoidable part of the problem, despite the fact that misuse of antibiotics in people is responsible for the lion's share.*
- **It shouldn't** *be up to consumers to keep their kitchens like operating theatres in order to avoid the many different bugs (antibiotic-resistant and others) in meat. The industry should ensure all our meat is contaminated as little as possible.*

CHOOK?



CORBIS IMAGES

VRE cases are not the type that comes from animals. VRE has been found in chickens and pigs fed the antibiotic avoparcin, which is similar to vancomycin. Avoparcin was withdrawn from sale worldwide in December 1999 (it was suspended from use in Europe in 1997, but was registered for use in Australia until this later time, and existing stocks could still be used). It's been largely replaced by the antibiotic virginiamycin, which some experts argue still contributes to the persistence of VRE in animals, though others disagree. Virginiamycin is closely related to synercid, another antibiotic in the last line of defence for humans.

CHOOKS ON TEST

Our snapshot survey of 141 chickens bought from supermarkets in Brisbane and Sydney found 13% overall infected with VRE — 11% in Brisbane and 14% in Sydney. That's more than one chicken contaminated in every 10.

SO SHOULD YOU STOP EATING CHICKEN?

It's certainly of concern that we found so many contaminated chickens. There's evidence that resistant bacteria or their resistant genes can be passed on to us via the food chain (through food handling or eating undercooked meat, for example). So you definitely need to take particular care when cooking and handling raw chicken (and other meats) — especially if you, or someone else eating the food, is seriously ill in some way.

In Australia to date, there have been no deaths where VRE was the only cause, but a number of deaths have occurred with VRE as a complicating factor (although, unbelievably, there's no national mandatory reporting of this infection).

It's also worth noting that in Australia, the majority (around 80%) of the strain of resistant enterococci found in sick people isn't the type for which the link between animal and human resistance is established. That means only a small proportion of human infection can so far be suspected to have come about due to resistance transferred from animal bugs to human enterococci.

Overall, although the risk appears to be small, it still exists, especially for people who are already sick. There's already a series of potential bacterial problems with meat; this new threat is just another to add to a long list of things that can make you ill if you don't handle it with care.

You need to make sure your food handling practices are immaculate to stop bacteria spreading around your kitchen, and make sure you cook your chook thoroughly. For more on safe food handling and chook-cooking, see CHOICE, December 2001, pages 22–25.

CONSUMERS FIRST, NOT INDUSTRY

Overuse of antibiotics in the human community is certainly the biggest problem in the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. But use of antibiotics as growth promoters in animals does add fuel to the fire.

Antibiotics need to be used wisely and sparingly; as a minimum, those important in human medicine shouldn't be used as growth

GOVERNMENT ACTION

At the end of 1999 a joint government agriculture and health committee (JETACAR) finalised its report on antibiotic use in animals. The 22 recommendations — looking at ways of reducing the problem of bacterial antibiotic resistance — were the basis for the development of a management plan, which is currently being implemented. The latest on where this process is up to can be found on the JETACAR website (www.health.gov.au/publhlth/strateg/jetacar/index.htm).

THE BIG PICTURE

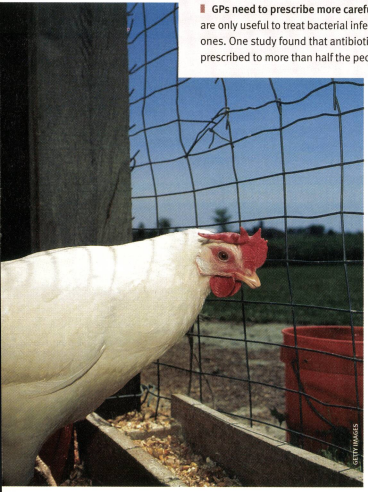
Antibiotic-resistant bugs in food are only one part of the picture: the most significant problem is the misuse and overuse of antibiotics in treating people.

Resistance to bugs isn't a new thing. Almost as soon as penicillin was invented, there were reports of resistance. But in the early days new antibiotics were always being found to take on the bugs' best defences. These days, though, new antibiotics can't keep pace with the bugs, and we're faced with a number of infectious bacteria that are resistant to almost all known antibiotics.

We're rapidly approaching the spectre of people dying from once treatable infections. Cheap and traditional antibiotics such as penicillin are becoming less effective against common infections. For example, much more expensive drugs are now needed to treat pneumococci, which can cause ear infections, pneumonia and meningitis. And in the US, some strains of tuberculosis (TB) are resistant to all available TB drugs.

What can we do?

- **GPs need to prescribe more carefully.** Antibiotics are only useful to treat bacterial infections, not viral ones. One study found that antibiotics were prescribed to more than half the people going to their doctor for upper respiratory tract infections (like flu, sore throats and colds). But viruses, not bacteria, are almost always responsible for these illnesses — antibiotics won't help.
- **Consumers need to be aware that antibiotics aren't a universal panacea.** Many people have come to expect their doctor can always fix a problem by giving them something to take — they're not impressed by a 'wait and see' approach. Doctors can feel pressured to prescribe antibiotics. Don't demand them if your doctor says you don't need them.
- **If you're prescribed antibiotics, take them as prescribed.** Take the correct dosage and take it on time.
- **Infection control in hospitals needs to improve.** Less than ideal procedures can account for the spread of resistance in hospitals. Numerous studies have shown that something as simple as hospital staff washing their hands between seeing patients doesn't always happen. Don't be afraid to ask someone to wash their hands if they've neglected to do it.
- **We need to stop using antibiotics to promote growth in food-producing animals.** There's no argument regarding the use of antibiotics for veterinary reasons. But for promoting growth, industry needs to find better ways of doing things — life-saving antibiotics are too important and many are already on the endangered list.



promoters in animals. In fact an international meeting organised by the World Health Organization has recommended the 'termination' of growth promoters with human health implications.

The industry argues that the use of antibiotics isn't driven by bottom-line greed, but rather by pressure to reduce the cost of food production and increase food availability. However, other experts argue that while the benefits of antibiotics in promoting growth may have been significant 30 years ago, modern farming methods mean they're overstated. They say the experience in Europe bears this out — Danish chickens not routinely given antibiotics grew just as well, didn't get sicker and only ate a little more feed over their lifetime (less than 1%).

Continued use of antibiotics in animals to promote growth means yet another aspect of food safety is being laid on the shoulders of consumers. Antibiotic-resistant bugs are just another reason why cooking is becoming less of a simple pleasure and more a daily domestic drama to ensure we kill all the bacteria and don't give them a chance to spread around our kitchens.

Yes, you can be careful, but not everyone will get it perfect every time — this new problem of antibiotic resistance, added to other bacteria that can be found on meat, makes us increasingly concerned that more people will get sick.

This is something the food industry should act on, rather than continue to trot out the same old line that there would be no problem if consumers cooked food properly — and, presumably, scrubbed up like surgeons in their own kitchens. ■

word on the street

The buzz on what's new and happening in the marketplace

SCAMWATCH WEBSITE

If you've ever been scammed, it's a small comfort to know that you're not alone. A new website, **www.scamwatch.gov.au,** is the initiative of various state and federal government agencies, designed to highlight some of the more common scams in Australia.

Divided into sections including pyramid schemes, internet and medical scams, 'amazing offers', door-to-door, investment and self-employment scams, you'll find out specifics of different types of scam, how to recognise one and how it works and, most importantly, what you can do to protect yourself against scammers.

Finally, you can try the 'games' to check your vulnerability to scams and fraud.

What's new with digital cameras?

Every so often in the world of hi-tech an innovation changes the direction of the entire market. Foveon X3 technology could do this for digital cameras.

Most of the better-quality non-professional digital cameras use a silicon chip called a CCD (charge-coupled device) in the same way a traditional camera uses film. A different chip, called CMOS (complementary metal oxide semiconductor), is often used in other segments of the digital camera market. Foveon X3 is a CMOS technology with the potential to spread across the whole market and possibly increase the quality of digital images at the same time.

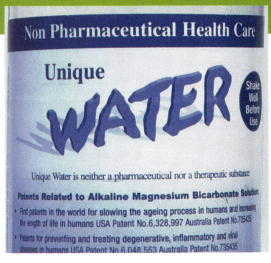
Foveon X3 uses only one pixel (spot on the sensor) to gather information on red, green and blue (RGB) light, where a CCD has to use a separate pixel for each colour. So a CCD camera with three million pixels is combining one million pixels each of red, green and blue via some very sophisticated software to produce an image.

A three million pixel Foveon X3 chip behaves more like traditional film: as the light penetrates the sensor, the RGB colour information is captured at different depths of the same pixel. This has the effect of almost eliminating interference patterns usually associated with digital images. It may also mean cameras with higher resolution and truer colours.

Manufacturers of digital cameras think Foveon X3 has potential, but it also has some inherent problems that could price it out of the non-professional digital camera market.

If you need a digital camera now, don't wait for the new technology — it could be well over a year away. But if you can wait, keep your eyes open for it.

FOVEON MARKETING


Non Pharmaceutical Health Care
Unique
WATER
Shake Well Before Use
Unique Water is neither a pharmaceutical nor a therapeutic substance
Patents Related to Alkaline Magnesium Bicarbonate Solution
First patents in the world for slowing the ageing process in humans and increasing the length of life in humans USA Patent No.6,328,997 Australia Patent No.735435
Patents for preventing and treating degenerative, inflammatory and viral diseases in humans USA Patent No.6,048,565 Australia Patent No.735435

RHONDA TYWAITE

UNIQUELY INTERESTING WATER

All it took was an article in the main Sydney weekend paper by a journo who swears by the stuff, curiously timed to coincide with the date **UNIQUE WATER** became available by the case at a Sydney drink company, and hey, presto! There were queues of people waiting to fork out $30 a case (24 x 600 mL bottles) for water. Water that may — or may not — have something to offer sufferers of such things as arthritis, auto-immune and degenerative diseases.

Sure, it's cheaper than Evian, but what's the evidence it works? Sadly, though it's an interesting hypothesis, there's currently no real evidence that the water does anything. There are no scientific studies, only anecdotal reports from people who've used it and found it worked for them.

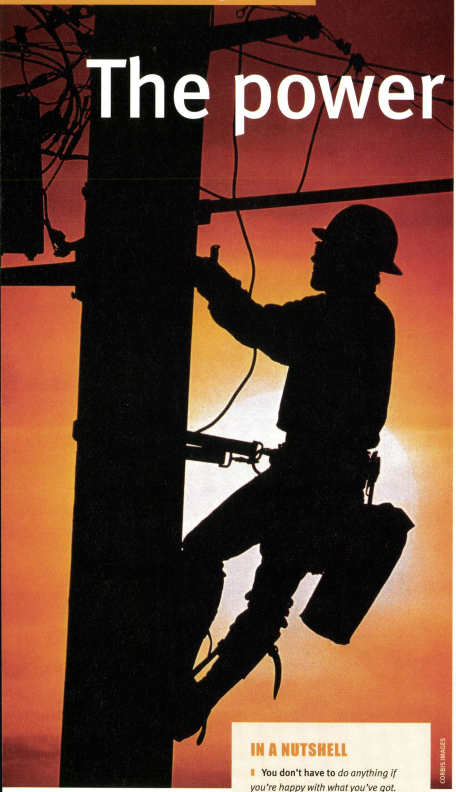
To the credit of the scientist who came up with the theory and developed the water, he's reportedly seeking medical specialists and government-accredited research institutes interested in doing the appropriate trials. His theory is the water helps our bodies to neutralise acids produced in our cells that can cause ageing and disease.

Until the research is in (and that'll be a while) it remains an interesting but unproven idea — so CHOICE's advice is to tread cautiously before committing yourself to buying and drinking the two to three bottles a day (around 1.2 to 2 L, unflavoured and between meals) that even converts say you must drink to gain the claimed benefits.

Have you seen or heard about something new and innovative you'd like us to investigate? We can't promise to check out everything you tell us about, but we'd love to know what attracts your interest. Email wots@choice.com.au, or see page 2 for other ways to contact us (please mark it to the attention of Word on the Street).

The power of choice

If you live in NSW or Victoria, you can now choose who to buy your electricity from. Should you switch or stay with your current retailer?



CORBIS IMAGES

IN A NUTSHELL

- **You don't have to** *do anything if you're happy with what you've got.*
- **If you're not a 'big user',** *there's a good chance you won't be able to get a cheaper deal.*
- **When comparing** *different products, make sure they include all costs (network charges, electricity costs, fees, GST, etc) — and have a good look at the contracts' terms and conditions.*

Which phone company are you using these days? Even if it's still Telstra, chances are you've looked at competitors' offers at some point, or been approached by a door-to-door or telemarketing salesperson trying to lure you away from the once monopoly phone retailer.

If you live in NSW or Victoria, you're now faced with a similar situation for your electricity supply. Since the beginning of the year, you've been able to choose who you buy your power from (the industry jargon for this is 'full retail contestability' or FRC).

Now that where you live no longer determines which retailer supplies you with electricity in those states, you have three options:

- If you're happy with what you're getting, or simply couldn't be bothered, you don't have to do anything. In this case, you'll stay with your current retailer under independently regulated electricity prices and conditions. You can also go for this option if you want to wait and see how things develop. There's no time limit to change retailers.
- You can accept a new offer from or negotiate a new deal with your current retailer.
- You can sign up with one of the other licensed retailers offering electricity in your area, if they have a better deal for you.

To find out whether you can get a better deal, check *What the retailers are offering*, page 14. Generally, the higher your household's energy consumption (for example, if you have an air conditioner or a swimming pool), the better your chances are for money savings under a new contract.

For a large number of households, though, the best option will be to stay where you are if saving money is your aim. However, you may have other reasons to change retailers — for example, you may find it

convenient to combine your electricity and gas bills into one retailer's dual-fuel product (see *Natural gas competition*, page 14), or you may be unhappy with your current retailer's service.

The ACT and South Australia are planning to introduce a choice of electricity provider for households by January 2003. Queensland is unlikely to do so for the time being, but may reconsider at a later stage.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTRACT

If you haven't changed to a new contract yet, you're on a **standard form** or **deemed** contract. The electricity prices you pay on this contract are regulated by your state government and are publicly available.

If you're considering changing to another electricity product, it may be helpful to ask your current retailer for a copy of the deemed contract, so you can compare its terms and conditions with those of contracts offered to you under FRC.

These are called **negotiated**, **standing** or **market** contracts. They still have to meet some minimum standards set by the state regulators, for example regarding billing and disconnection. But they allow you to negotiate a range of conditions (such as the duration of the contract and payment methods) that are binding once you've signed the contract.

Retailers may have fixed tariffs that go with such contracts (and may publish them in brochures or on their websites), or they may negotiate electricity prices with you for your individual situation.

When comparing new products and offers with each other and with your standard contract, look for the following:

- Are the quotes comparable? For example, do they include electricity charges, network charges, all fees and GST?
- What's the duration of the contract? Are there charges if you break it? What happens if you move house while still under the contract?
- How and when will you be billed? What payment options do you have? What happens if you miss a payment? What are the disconnection and reconnection conditions?
- Can the prices change during the term of the contract?
- Does the retailer have a complaints scheme?

Don't accept an offer until you're satisfied you understand all the details, and are happy with them — especially before signing a long-term contract.

GREEN POWER

One of Australia's world-leader positions is nothing to be proud of: we have the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions, having recently overtaken the US. This is largely because we rely on coal to generate our electricity.

If you live in NSW, it's easy to find out just how much carbon dioxide your electricity consumption is generating. The four government-owned retailers have started to include this information on their bills — so take a close look next time you receive one.

If you don't like what you see, you can do something about it. Almost all electricity retailers in Australia currently offer — at a slightly higher price — an accredited 'Green Power' scheme, which guarantees the electricity sold under that scheme is generated by renewable energy sources such as solar or wind.

Green Electricity Watch, an initiative by a number of Australian conservation groups, has rated the various Green Power products, and found that some

TRU

It's not all change

Whether you stay or change, some things remain the same and others should work for the consumer:

- Only retailers licensed by the government of the state they want to operate in are allowed to compete for your energy business.
- Electricity and gas safety standards remain in place.
- The transmission and distribution of electricity and gas remain unchanged and regulated by state governments. So your supply won't be affected.
- Concessions (such as for pensioners) still apply.
- If you're unhappy with your retailer, try to sort out the problem with them first (the best way is by putting it in writing). If that fails, you can complain to your state's energy ombudsman (see *Useful contacts*, page 15).
- If you stay on your current standard contract, you'll continue to pay regulated prices.
- If you want to change to a new contract, you don't have to install a new meter.
- Retailers have agreed to follow a marketing code of conduct, which includes a 10-day cooling-off period after you've signed a new contract.
- Should your retailer go bust, you're guaranteed to be automatically transferred to the standard supplier in your area — your 'retailer of last resort' — so your supply is ensured. However, there may be a charge for this.
- If you've switched to a negotiated contract, you can always go back to your original retailer on a standard contract. However, you may have to pay a penalty for breaking the negotiated contract, and a reconnection fee.
- If you're renting but pay the electricity bill, you can choose your retailer.

Accredited green power schemes use this logo.

do more than just meet the minimum requirements:

- Origin Energy's **GREEN EARTH PLUS** was awarded market leader status.
- **ENVIROENERGY** (from TXU), **GREEN EARTH** (Origin Energy) and **GREEN ENERGY** (Australian Inland Energy and Water) all go beyond compliance.

So if you're really keen to get the 'greenest' possible electricity and live in NSW or Victoria, you may now be able to switch to one of the above products.

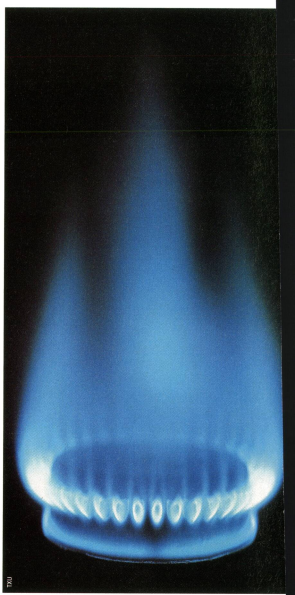
For details of the Green Power report, contact the Nature Conservation Council of NSW on (02) 9279 2466, or go to www.nccnsw.org.au/ncc/context/greenelectricity.html.

NATURAL GAS COMPETITION

In the ACT and NSW, natural gas has been opened for competition as well. Victorians will have to wait until October 2002.

As with electricity competition, only the retail end of the market is affected. And you have the same options: do nothing and stay with your current retailer at regulated tariffs, negotiate a new deal with your current retailer, or shop around for a better offer.

For example, buying your electricity and gas from the same retailer (a number are offering such dual-fuel deals) could not only save you money, but you may also appreciate the convenience of receiving only one energy bill.



TXU

WHAT THE RETAILERS ARE OFFERING

As at the deadline for this article, not all the licensed retailers had entered the market. And most of those who have are currently limiting their activities to their home state.

If your household is particularly attractive for a retailer, chances are you've already been contacted by your existing retailer or even one of its competitors.

If not, you can call the retailers on the numbers in the table and ask for an offer. You usually need at least your last electricity and/or gas bill. And you'll probably have to answer a number of questions about what kind of appliances you have and how you use them.

Some retailers are also planning to install a web facility allowing you to assess your household yourself online — so check their websites.

Retailer	Has entered the market	Phone for an offer	Website	Which fuel?*
ActewAGL	NSW and Vic	13 14 93	www.actewagl.com.au	Electricity and gas
AGL	NSW and Vic	13 12 45	www.agl.com.au	Electricity and gas
Australian Inland Energy and Water	NSW only	1300 650 477	www.aienergy.com.au	Electricity
CitiPower	Vic only	13 12 60	www.citipower.com.au	Electricity and gas
Country Energy	NSW and Vic	13 23 56	www.countryenergy.com.au	Electricity and gas
Energex	No	na	www.energex.com.au	na
Energy Australia	NSW only	13 15 03	www.energy.com.au	Electricity and gas
Integral Energy	**(A)**	**(A)**	www.integral.com.au	**(A)**
Origin Energy	Vic only	13 24 63	www.originenergy.com.au	Electricity and gas
Power Direct	Vic only	1800 887 787	www.powerdirect.info	Electricity
Pulse Energy	Vic only	13 30 00	www.pulsenet.com.au	Electricity and gas
TXU	Vic only	13 34 66	www.txu.com.au	Electricity and gas

na *Not applicable*
(A) *No information provided.*

* *In Victoria, the gas market won't become contestable until October 2002. Until then, retailers can offer gas only to their existing customers.*

How your bill's worked out

There are three parts to the electricity industry:

- **Generators:** They produce electricity from coal or other sources such as the sun or wind.
- **Distributors/network operators:** They transport electricity from the generators to where it's needed.
- **Retailers:** They sell electricity to the end user, such as your household, and bill you for it. Only this part of the industry has been opened to competition in NSW and Victoria.

Generating a market

The ACT, NSW, Queensland, SA and Victoria have formed the National Electricity Market (NEM). In principle, all the generators in these states sell their electricity to the NEM, and all the retailers buy electricity from it at wholesale prices set on a half-hourly basis.

Both generators and retailers have to pay the network operators to use the transmission and distribution system. Retailers recover that cost from you via a network charge that's part of your bill.

The wholesale electricity price differences during a day can be massive — from tens of dollars per MWh (megawatt hour, or one thousand kWh) to (in extreme cases) several thousand dollars.

That's because electricity demand varies a lot during a day — from a relatively low load during the night to high demand during the day (when businesses operate) and potentially big peaks mainly in late afternoon and early evening when people come home from work and switch on their electric heater (in winter) or air conditioner (in summer).

Forecasting demand

It's not practical to store electricity on a big scale. So basically any electricity that's generated but not used is wasted.

Retailers have the difficult task of forecasting the daily demand with all its fluctuations (which depend, for example, on the weather) as precisely as possible, and buying as close to that amount as possible from the NEM.

The generators adjust the output of their power plants accordingly, and try to produce just as much electricity as is needed at any given time. During times of peak demand, they may have to run their plants at full capacity or even use back-up plants, which increases generation costs.

If retailers get it wrong and demand is higher than expected, supply can run short and prices skyrocket. However, there are market mechanisms retailers can use to reduce their risk (for example, they can negotiate supply contracts for the future at a certain price).

Profiling consumption

Another problem for retailers is that while they buy electricity on the NEM for prices that change every half-hour, standard electricity meters don't show how many kWh you've used in each half-hour interval.

Their solution is to work out a 'profile' for the average consumption over a day of all the households they supply, and then to calculate an average kWh price for general electricity consumption.

This isn't fair to all households — for example, if you don't have an air conditioner, you still pay a tariff that's taking into account peak prices that may be caused by households with air conditioners.

Most retailers also have special tariffs for night consumption (when wholesale prices are cheaper) — for example, for off-peak hot water systems.

Under FRC, retailers may apply more than one profile, and you may be able to save money by signing up for one that better reflects your lifestyle and how you use the appliances in your household.

And in the future retailers may offer special tariffs if you install a so-called smart meter, which records your consumption on a half-hourly basis. However, smart meters currently cost several hundred dollars and aren't yet an economical option for most households.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Government (general FRC information):

- *NSW, 1300 136 888; www.nsw.gov.au/electricity/index.html.*
- *Victoria, 1300 134 575; www.reggen.vic.gov.au/frc/index.html.*

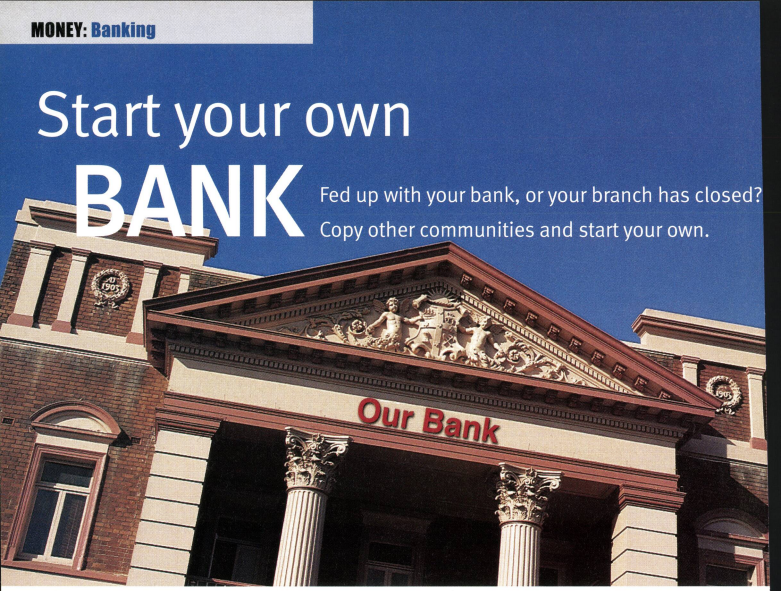
Energy and Water Ombudsman (complaints):

- *NSW, (02) 8218 5200 (or 1800 246 545 outside Sydney); www.ewon.com.au.*
- *Victoria, 1800 500 509; www.ewov.com.au.*

Green Power:
www.greenpower.com.au.

Start your own BANK

Fed up with your bank, or your branch has closed? Copy other communities and start your own.



IN A NUTSHELL

- **More than 2000** *bank branches have closed down in recent years. For many communities, especially in rural Australia, this has also led to a downturn in local business.*
- **The tide might have turned:** *local communities, together with a banking partner, are starting their own banks.*
- **While community banks** *can make a real difference to a town, they aren't an easy solution. Local residents have to put in a lot of time and hard work to get them going.*

It's a story happening all over Australia: "We lost our last bank branch about two years ago. There's still a small agency at the post office but of course it's not the same," says Elizabeth from Murrumbeena in Melbourne.

Elizabeth travels to a neighbouring suburb to do her banking and shopping. The queues in the bank branches there have become longer: "On some occasions the queues have been virtually out of the door, which is annoying," she says. And the traders in her local shopping centre suffer: "From my observations, I'd say the shopping strip is quieter since the bank went," says Elizabeth.

Bank branch closures can go hand in hand with the decline of communities, especially in rural Australia. Usually residents shop where they bank. So no banking service can mean a downturn for local businesses and a generally pessimistic view about the future of the community.

This chilling picture was one of the main reasons for residents of Crow's Nest in south Queensland to set up a community branch: "Without a financial institution our town would be struggling," says Baden Brown, one of the directors of the community company behind the bank.

And they're not alone: all over Australia community banks are getting up and going.

We talked to people in three communities who invested time and effort to start 'their own bank':

- Galston, a semi-rural community on the outskirts of Sydney.
- Nanango, a farming community less than two hours' drive inland from the Sunshine Coast in Queensland.
- Paraburdoo, a small community servicing an iron mine close to the Karijini National Park in Western Australia.

However, as banking is strictly regulated in Australia, communities can't do it all by themselves. Financial institutions need an authorisation under the Banking Act and must meet prudential standards overseen by the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA).

So all three communities found partners for their banking venture: the Galston Community Bank is a franchise of Bendigo Bank, Nanango a joint venture with the Heritage Building Society and Paraburdoo is serviced by a branch of United Credit Union.

BENDIGO COMMUNITY BANKS

Bendigo Bank has become the face of community banking after developing a model in 1998. Briefly, it works like this:

- Members of the local community form a committee and collect pledges of support — and of money — from the local community.
- Residents have a meeting and decide whether to go ahead with the project.
- The community forms a company to purchase the right to operate a Bendigo Bank franchise.
- Bendigo Bank provides the banking support and the revenue is shared with the community company.
- The community company usually distributes around 20% of its profit to shareholders, with 80% used to benefit the local community.

For example, one of the first Bendigo community banks, Lang Lang in Victoria, opened a business centre offering rooms rent-free to professionals, thereby attracting a lawyer, an accountant and a surveyor back into the town.

More than 60 of these community banks have already been opened and Bendigo Bank is working with another 80 communities.

Elizabeth says local traders in her suburb are trying to get community support for a Bendigo community bank but so far haven't achieved the required pledges.

The set-up process for a community bank usually takes between 12 months and two years.

In Galston a community bank opened in March this year. Galston and neighbouring areas have a population of around 6000; properties usually have five to 20 acres, with hobby farms, nurseries and orchards being typical of the area.

Residents immediately formed a committee when the closure of their National Australia Bank branch was announced. The committee raised around 330 pledges from local residents indicating support for the community bank by promising to buy shares to a value of over $750,000.

More than 350 residents came to the public meeting and gave the project the go-ahead. A feasibility study showed a very positive picture and the community company Galston Financial Service Ltd was formed.

When the National closed its doors in September last year, a temporary Bendigo Bank agency was set up in the local travel agent's office.

Meanwhile the franchise agreement with Bendigo Bank was signed and a prospectus for the Galston Community Bank was issued with a minimum start-up amount of $600,000, which was quickly reached and surpassed.

Ralph Steele, chairman of the Galston community company, at 'Our Bank'.

Interestingly, the new community bank bought the old National building. It's fairly typical for community banks to move into an old bank building: Paraburdoo trades from the former Westpac building; Nanango purchased its building from the Commonwealth Bank.

Want to start your own bank?

Whether a Bendigo Community Bank model, a Heritage branch or a credit union would be suitable for your town depends on your community's circumstances and preferences. For more information on the differences between the three models, contact:

- **Bendigo Bank:** Russell Jenkins, head of community banking, phone (03) 5433 9158.
- **Credit unions:** Contact a credit union in your local area, or the Credit Union Foundation of Australia: Margaret Lester, development manager, phone (02) 6232 6666.
- **Heritage Building Society** (for communities in south-eastern Queensland and northern NSW): Tim Hoy, manager, community branches, phone (07) 4694 9602.

THE ADVERTISER NEWS IMAGES

Wendy Zerbst at the Heritage Nanango Community Branch: "Banking provided a service when I grew up. That's changed. But we can give something back to the community."

HERITAGE NANANGO COMMUNITY BRANCH

The Nanango community also approached Bendigo Bank when they heard that one local bank would close and the other two would downgrade their services. However, they then decided to take up Heritage Building Society's offer to form a joint venture.

Like Bendigo Bank, Heritage brings the banking expertise to the project and receives an equal share of the revenue.

The Nanango community branch opened in December last year. It's the second backed by Heritage Building Society, which is currently also talking to a number of other communities in south-east Queensland and northern NSW.

The set-up process involving the local community has similarities to the Bendigo Bank model but less start-up capital is required. This was important for the historic gold-mining town, which has a population of only around 2500 and relies mainly on dairy, beans, grain, a power station and a coal mine for a living.

Both banking models require a lot of time and hard work. Ralph Steele, a film industry sound recordist and chairman of the Galston community company explains: "The directors have been working tirelessly towards the setting up of Our Bank [*sic*] for just over a year and we believe this is about as quickly as it can be done. To do this you need a defined, responsive and dedicated community with a board who are willing to get their hands dirty."

As in Galston, the people involved at Nanango don't get any reimbursement for their services — even the directors of the community company don't get anything.

Wendy Zerbst, a physiotherapist and homemaker and spokesperson for Nanango Progressive Community, says: "Banking provided a service when I grew up. That's changed; banks now make a profit for their shareholders. We figured if they can do that, then we can do it as well and give something back to the community."

The Nanango community company has 164 members who each pledged between $200 and $5000, making a combined amount of $160,000. Unlike the Bendigo Bank model they aren't shareholders but members, and will receive interest on their money.

"People didn't put their money into it to make money but to get this up and running," says Wendy.

The rest of the profits will go to a trust fund to be distributed to community projects.

THE CREDIT UNION MODEL

Paraburdoo is a mining town with a population of around 1200 people. It was founded in the late 1960s to service an iron mine in the area.

"It's built in a style to attract people to the town: we've a 50 m swimming pool, good sporting facilities, big grassy areas and trees," says shire councillor Peter Foote.

When the local Westpac bank announced it was going to pull out of the town, Peter and other residents were concerned: "The next bank for us is in Tom Price, which is a return drive of about 160 km."

They contacted CreditCare, which was initiated by the Credit Union movement and supported by the Commonwealth and NSW state governments to bring financial services back to towns that had lost these facilities.

RURAL TRANSACTION CENTRES

This Commonwealth Government program helps small communities develop a multiple-service centre. It can offer access to financial services, Centrelink, Medicare and other community and business services.

Funding is available for communities that have lost these services and have a population of less than 3000 people.

Contact: Department of Transport and Regional Services, RTC Secretariat, phone 1800 038 160; www.dotars.gov.au/rtc/.

It operated from July 1995 to July 2000 and successfully helped establish 54 financial services facilities in mostly rural communities.

Usually a CreditCare field officer helped the community assess its capacity to support a viable financial facility and to develop a business plan. This was then used to attract a financial institution — usually a credit union — to provide financial services to the town.

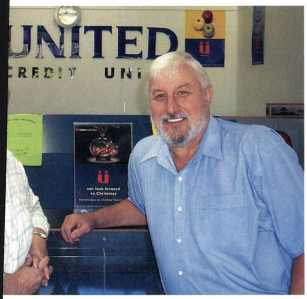
The process involved has similarities to what happened in Galston and Nanango, with the important differences that the community didn't need to raise start-up capital and isn't directly involved in the financial institution and distribution of profits.

While CreditCare doesn't exist any more, the Credit Union Foundation is still helping communities with this process. The Commonwealth Government is now supporting a new project — see *Rural transaction centres*, below left.

To get the service up and running in Paraburdoo, the shire council provided the building rent-free to United Credit Union for the first three years. And more importantly, as in Galston and Nanango, the community stands behind and supports the financial institution, thereby ensuring its viability.

OUR VERDICT

Community banks can make a real difference to towns by boosting confidence and economic activity, stimulating new business and attracting new services. However, whether the financial products they provide give you a better deal may vary depending on the financial services provided.



Leslie Winters and Peter Foote: having a credit union in town means they don't have to drive 80 km each way to the nearest bank.

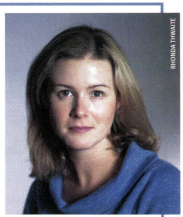
A community bank might not be feasible or viable for all communities. Disadvantaged rural towns in particular might not be able to afford the set-up costs, and not every town is blessed with people who have the time and energy to get these projects up and running.

CHOICE thinks communities shouldn't have to contribute to the costs of getting their financial services back and share the business risk. For example, if a Bendigo community bank closes down, the shareholders could lose their money. But in the current banking climate, many people may think a community bank is a better option than nothing.

A number of customers of community banks also told us about one important advantage they seem to have over the big four banks: good old-fashioned face-to-face service.

So says Elizabeth, "My parents live in Pearcedale, Victoria, where a Bendigo community bank opened last year. They immediately transferred their accounts over. It's local so they don't have to drive 20 minutes, it's open on Saturdays, the friendly counter staff know my mum by name and, as nearly 80-year-old pensioners with small accounts, my parents feel they're getting much better service than they ever got from their old bank." ■

ANOTHER 56 TO GO — OR HOW MUCH PROFIT IS ENOUGH?


BRONISA TAMALIC

At the time of writing, National Australia Bank (NAB) announced a new strategy to boost profits that included the closure of 56 regional branches, mostly in Victoria and NSW.

According to the Finance Sector Union, these branches are all profitable — bank customers are still paying high fees despite years of service rationalisation. They provide a vital service for those 56 communities, meeting both a consumer and a business demand for banking that in some cases isn't otherwise available.

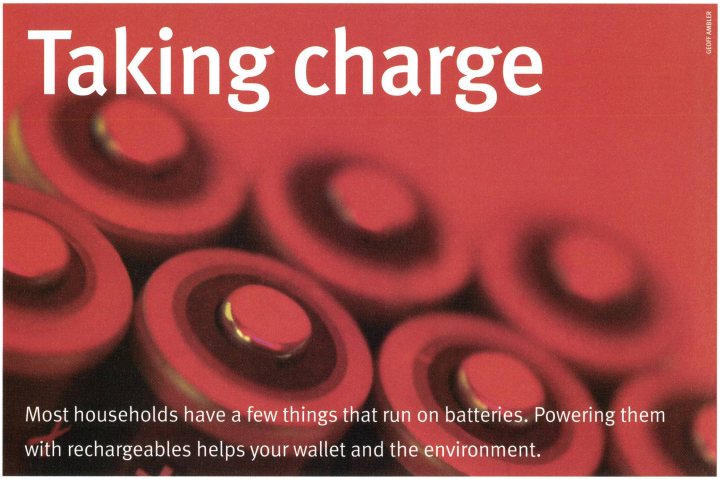
NAB is Australia's most profitable bank, with a $2.08 billion profit for the 2000/2001 financial year. It says it will continue to offer the same or 'improved' levels of service through agencies, such as Australia Post.

The Consumers' Association thinks closures like these show the need for a social charter of community obligations for the banking sector. Banks need to be made to consider more than just their profits.

What do you think? Tell us your experiences with agencies: do they offer the same or adequate levels of services?

Write to Catherine Wolthuizen (pictured) at CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or send an email to agencies@choice.com.au.

Taking charge



GEOFF AMBLER

Most households have a few things that run on batteries. Powering them with rechargeables helps your wallet and the environment.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **For most uses,** *rechargeable batteries — particularly nickel metal hydride ones — are far better value for money than non-rechargeable types.*
- **Rechargeable alkalines** *(RAMs) last about as long as normal alkalines for the first few charges, but if you take advantage of this and keep draining them completely, they won't recharge to full capacity any more and so will no longer last as long.*

Listening to your personal CD player on the daily commute or keeping the kids entertained with motorised toys can chew through lots of batteries. If a bulk pack of them is a regular item on your shopping list, it's worth trying rechargeables instead in at least some of your devices.

Their upfront costs are comparatively high: they're much more expensive than alkaline non-rechargeables, plus you have to invest in a suitable charger — see *The right charger*, page 23. But they'll save you money in the long run.

For example, two sets of four of the top rechargeable AA batteries in this test plus a charger will set you back around $90–$100. You could buy around 50–60 non-rechargeable alkalines for that price. If you use battery-operated appliances, toys and so on regularly (getting through, say, a bit more than a set of four per month), you'd be able to recover the cost of the rechargeable set-up within a year or so. You'd also prevent dozens of non-rechargeable batteries from going to landfill.

However, there are differences between types, and not all types are suitable for all purposes.

NICAD AND NIMH

- Nickel metal hydride (NiMH) batteries are generally more expensive to buy than nickel cadmiums (NiCads), but most last longer and give you better value for money.
- NiMH batteries are better environmentally than NiCads, because they don't contain the toxic heavy metal cadmium (see *Getting rid of old batteries*, page 23, for details).
- Both types don't last as long as some non-rechargeable batteries per single cycle — in our tests they lasted between one third and two thirds as long as alkalines, depending on the model and the use. So if a battery that keeps going as long as possible is most important for you, you might still prefer non-rechargeable alkalines. But if you can be organised enough always to have one or more spare charged sets handy, rechargeables will do the job much more cheaply.
- But that also has its limits. Both NiCads and NiMHs lose capacity over time even if they're not used (NiCads tend to self-drain more). So they're not suitable for equipment that's only used occasionally, such as a torch. And you can't leave them in the drawer for

WHAT TO BUY

Energizer NH15AA (A)	$6.45
Powerhaus PHS130AA2 (B)	$6.50

(A) This model has been replaced by the NH15BP 1700 mAh battery (around $6.50).

(B) This model has been replaced by the Digitor 170AAHC S3149 1700 mAh battery (around $7.50).

If you're starting new with rechargeable batteries, go for NiMH and a matching charger.

Testing rechargeable batteries takes a long time, and unfortunately the top two overall performers in our test — the **ENERGIZER** and **POWERHAUS**, both NiMH — have already been superseded. However, their higher-capacity replacement models (see above for details) are likely to last even longer per cycle, and — as they're not much more expensive than the old models — likely to give you even better value for money. We're currently testing the new models and hope to report on them in more detail by the end of the year.

If you already have a NiCad charger and want to stick with this type, the high-capacity (1000 mAh) **DICK SMITH ELECTRONICS Gold** ($5.60) and **PANASONIC** ($6.65) models last the longest in use and give you the best value for money for NiCad batteries. Just check that your charger is suitable for their capacity.

The old and new Energizer batteries look exactly the same — the only difference to look for is the model number: NH15BP on the new 1700 mAh version.

The Powerhaus tested (left) and its 1700 mAh replacement, the Digitor 170AAHC S3149.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The **VARTA** NiMH model didn't last as long as the top performers. It's also much more expensive, so it's not as good value for money. It's now been replaced by the higher-capacity **VARTA 5606**.
- The identical **SANYO** and **TECHCESSORIES** NiMH models have the highest capacity and lasted much longer per cycle than the other NiMH and NiCad models. However, they're also the most expensive, so their value for money isn't as good as that of the top NiMH batteries. And they'd lost about a third of their initial capacity after 250 cycles, making them less likely to recharge for as many cycles as other models.
- Only two of the NiCads, the 1000 mAh **DICK SMITH ELECTRONICS Gold** and **PANASONIC**, give you comparable value for money to the top-performing NiMH models.
- See *Rechargeable alkalines*, left, for the pros and cons of RAM batteries.

extended periods and expect to use them immediately without recharging.

- Certain appliances carry a warning that you can't use them with rechargeables (for example, some PDAs). That's because they require batteries providing 1.5 volts, such as alkalines. NiCad and NiMH batteries provide only 1.2 V, and can't be used in such appliances.

RECHARGEABLE ALKALINES (RAMs)

RAMs combine the benefits of normal alkalines (high capacity, no heavy metal content) with being rechargeable. They also provide 1.5 V, so they're a good alternative to normal alkalines in appliances not suitable for NiCad or NiMH batteries. However, as their manufacturers point out and our tests confirm, you can't recharge them as often as other types.

But while they won't give you nearly the same value for money as NiCad or NiMH batteries, RAMs are still more economical than normal alkalines.

When they're new, they last about as long as normal alkalines in all but high-demand applications (see the table, page 22). But if you drain them completely to take advantage of this — as we did in our tests — you won't be able to charge them back to full capacity very often. In our test, they'd lost half their initial capacity after about 15 full discharges.

According to the manufacturers, though, you're supposed to use the RAMs only for a fraction of their capacity before recharging, in order to get more cycles out of them. The test results for a second set of samples that were only partially drained confirmed this claim — but it does mean RAMs then lose their attraction of being longer-lasting for each cycle.

THE TEST

We bought all the rechargeable AA models we could find in a wide range of Sydney shops in March 2001: nine nickel cadmiums (NiCad), five nickel metal hydrides (NiMH) and two rechargeable alkalines (RAM).

For comparative purposes, in some of the tests we also included two normal alkaline batteries. See the notes on page 22, for details.

Brand / model (in rank order)	Type	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Value for money score (%)	3 Consistency score (%)	4 Environment score (%)	5 Single-cycle performance (hours) Low drain	Medium drain	High drain	SPE Clai capa (mA
ENERGIZER NH15AA **(A)**	NiMH	85	85	100	70	9.00	3.50	1.75	1200
POWERHAUS PHS130AA2 **(B)**	NiMH	79	84	75	70	9.00	3.25	2.00	1300
VARTA 5506 **(C)**	NiMH	73	65	100	70	7.00	3.00	1.50	1100
DICK SMITH ELECTRONICS Gold S-3304	NiCad	71	76	88	40	8.75	3.50	1.75	1000
SANYO HR3U	NiMH	67	72	48	70	12.25	5.00	2.50	1600
TECHCESSORIES 230-9650	NiMH	67	72	48	70	12.25	5.00	2.50	1600
PANASONIC P-3GPT/2B	NiCad	65	66	88	40	8.50	3.25	1.75	1000
ARLEC B5P4AA	NiCad	64	60	100	40	5.75	2.50	1.00	600
RADIO SHACK 23-325	NiCad	64	60	100	40	6.00	2.75	1.00	700
DICK SMITH ELECTRONICS White S-3300	NiCad	57	54	82	40	5.75	2.75	1.00	600
EVEREADY CH15 **(D)**	NiCad	55	53	76	40	6.00	2.50	1.00	650
DICK SMITH ELECTRONICS Black S-3312 **(D)**	NiCad	54	51	76	40	6.25	2.75	1.25	700
RADIO SHACK 23-125 **(D)**	NiCad	54	45	97	40	5.25	2.25	1.00	600
SANYO 4N-3U	NiCad	54	47	90	40	6.75	3.00	1.00	700
BIG RAM RLR6AA	RAM	26	13 / 31	10	80	18.50	8.00	2.50	1500
GRANDCELL G103BP2-AU	RAM	25	12 / 31	10	80	16.00	6.25	2.00	1500
Non-rechargeable alkalines, included for comparative purposes (in alphabetical order)									
DURACELL MN1500	Alkaline	na	5	na	70	17.75	7.50	3.75	1500
ENERGIZER E91HP10	Alkaline	na	5	na	70	19.00	8.50	3.50	1500

* *Based on a nationwide survey in February 2002, and on two-packs if available (otherwise four-packs), rounded to the nearest five cents. We found big price differences for some models, so shop around. Some models may be difficult to find.*

na *Not applicable.*

(A) *According to the manufacturer, this battery has been replaced by the NH15BP 1700 mAh NiMH (about $6.50).* See What to buy, *page 21, for more.*

(B) *According to the distributor, this battery has been replaced by the Digitor 170AAHC 53149 1700 mAh NiMH (around $7.50).* See What to buy *for more.*

(C) *According to the manufacturer, this battery has been replaced by the 5606 1400 mAh NiMH (around $9.20).*

(D) *According to the manufacturer, this battery has been discontinued, but you may still find some in shops.*

1 Overall score

This consists of the following:

- Value for money score: 60%
- Consistency score: 20%
- Environment score: 20%

2 Value for money score

We continuously drained and charged four samples of each battery 250 times in a medium-drain scenario (similar to using a motorised toy), and recorded the average time they lasted. We then calculated the running time you get per dollar of their purchase price and converted that to a percentage.

- For rechargeables, the score is based on the price for four batteries plus a charger, and — for NiCad and NiMH models — on 250 cycles. They're all likely to last much longer than 250 cycles (improving their value for money), which is why this is given as a comparative score rather than overall running time.
- The RAM scores aren't based on 250 cycles, but on the number of cycles until their capacity dropped to one quarter: 80 cycles for the **BIG**, 100 for the **GRANDCELL**. Two samples of each model failed altogether before reaching 250 cycles. *Rechargeable alkalines,* page 21, explains how you can make them last longer. But no matter how you use them, they won't give you as good value as other rechargeables. The second figure in this column shows the result for a set of batteries we drained only partially.
- For the two non-rechargeable alkaline models included in the test for comparative purposes, the score is based on the cost of 250 sets of four samples.

3 Consistency score

We scored the running time drop between the first and 250th cycles. A model that starts with a very long running time can lose some of its capacity over 250 cycles, but still be left with a longer running time per cycle than a model that doesn't last very long but keeps all of its original capacity. However, a large drop means the model is less likely to last for as many cycles as a model that keeps its capacity. And the bigger the drop, the more likely it is you'll become frustrated by its performance.

4 Environment score

The score is mainly based on what heavy metals the batteries contain; see *Getting rid of old batteries,* above right. It also takes into account the number of non-rechargeable batteries they prevent going to landfill.

5 Single-cycle performance

We tested four samples of each model in three standard scenarios that make different demands on the battery, simulating a personal cassette player (low drain), a motorised toy (medium drain) and a camera flash (high drain). For comparative purposes, we also included two non-rechargeable alkaline models.

We used new rechargeables, so the results are 'best case' for them, as most models lost at least some of their initial capacity after 250 cycles (see note 3). This is particularly true for RAMs.

	Manufacturer / distributor	Cost per battery ($)*
co	Energizer	6.45
	Powerhaus	6.50
any	Varta Batteries	9.20
n	Dick Smith Electronics	5.60
n	Sanyo	9.35
n	Dick Smith Electronics	9.35
n	Panasonic	6.65
a	Arlec	3.25
n	Dick Smith Electronics	4.50
n	Dick Smith Electronics	4.40
	Energizer	4.00
n	Dick Smith Electronics	4.75
n	Dick Smith Electronics	5.20
n	Sanyo	6.75
ada	Coorey & Co	3.85
aysia	Grand Battery Technologies	3.85
na	Gillette	1.80
na	Energizer	1.85

Getting rid of old batteries

Landfill space is becoming scarce in some parts of Australia. Using any type of rechargeable battery prevents a large number of non-rechargeables from going to landfill. Under our test conditions, a RAM would have replaced about 15–20 alkalines, a NiCad about 70–110, and a NiMH about 120–140.

However, at some point they have to be disposed of themselves. And as there's currently no recycling scheme for household batteries, it's important they don't create environmental problems of their own.

- RAMs are the least problematic of the rechargeables. Similar to normal alkalines, they don't contain heavy metals, and it's OK to throw them in your normal household waste.
- NiMH batteries contain the heavy metal nickel, but it's still OK to dispose of them in normal household waste.
- NiCads contain nickel and cadmium, which is toxic and can damage some of the body's organs and cause cancer. If NiCads end up in landfill, the cadmium may leak into waterways and harm the environment. If possible, dispose of them in your local council's hazardous chemicals collection scheme.

IS THERE A MEMORY EFFECT?

This problem has been associated with NiCad batteries: you're supposed to discharge them completely before recharging or they're said to develop a 'memory', and over time you may not be able to recharge them to their original capacity any more.

However, CHOICE's German counterparts drained six NiCad models 50 times to only half their capacity, and didn't find any sign of a memory effect.

The right charger

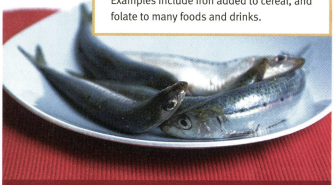
Matching rechargeable batteries with the right charger is important, or you may not get the most out of them and could even damage them.

- Each type of battery (NiCad, NiMH and RAM) needs its own charger.
- Batteries of the same type (say AA NiCads) can have different capacities (for example, 600 or 1000 mAh). Match the charger's capacity to that of the batteries you're using, or they may get damaged.
- Look for a charger that automatically reduces the charging capacity to a trickle once the batteries are fully charged, or they could be overcharged and damaged if left in the charger for too long.
- Some chargers supply a constant current while charging the batteries. This may heat them up, damage them over time and reduce the number of charges you get out of them. Look for a charger that monitors the batteries' temperature and adjusts the charging current accordingly.
- Never charge batteries that aren't designed for it, such as normal alkalines. They may rupture or even explode.

RHONDA THWAITE

What does fortified mean?

Fortified food's had vitamins or minerals added to it that weren't naturally present, or they're added to boost the amount that's there already. The Food Standards Code only allows certain foods to be fortified by particular vitamins and minerals. In theory, both the food and the vitamins or minerals are carefully chosen to target known potential deficiencies in the national diet. Examples include iron added to cereal, and folate to many foods and drinks.



NOT ALL FISH ARE EQUAL

All fish is good food, but only the oily types like salmon, sardines and tuna can help improve heart health and may also help with problems like arthritis and asthma.

PHOTOS: RHONDA JARRETT

JUST FEED YOUR KIDS FAT AND SUGAR ...

An alert subscriber sent us an ad for **NUTELLA** hazelnut spread, which describes it as "a wholesome and nutritious meal or snack that kids love".

It's hardly surprising kids love it: it's got 11 g of sugar (which is 55% of its total nutrition content) and 6 g of fat (30%) per tablespoon. That's not a wholesome, nutritious meal.

The ad goes on to extol **NUTELLA**'s supposed virtues in comparison with some other popular spreads — 10% less added sugar than jam and 40% less fat than most peanut butter. Most jam is certainly very high in sugar, but 10% less than a lot isn't a huge reduction — and jam has no fat. The highest-fat peanut butter we could find was 51%: higher than **NUTELLA** but without all the sugar as a double whammy.

There's nothing wrong with sometimes putting a peanut butter, jam or **NUTELLA** sandwich in your kids' lunchbox, but despite what the ad implies, **NUTELLA** isn't a comparatively better choice than the other fillings.

Orange juice with a twist

Those clever guys over at **AUSTRALIAN FRESH** have come up with a new product — **AUSTRALIAN FRESH Plus**. The label looks almost the same as their popular 100% orange juice, but with a twist: these juices have added calcium (or iron or vitamins A, C and E, depending on the variety).

What's that we hear you say — you're not supposed to add things like most vitamins and minerals to juice? True, but we did say they were clever: though the drink boxes look just like their 100% juice varieties, a closer look shows you that they're actually 99% juice and 1% whey (that's where the calcium comes from), or 90% juice and 10% "iron-fortified sports food" in the case of the **Plus** iron variety. The ACE one is 99% juice and 1% palm oil extract. Tricky, eh?

And if you've seen the TV ad for the variety with added calcium, we wonder if you're as hopping mad as the dentist who contacted us. As he points out, those disgusting-looking decayed teeth that feature at the end of the ad aren't likely to be the result of not getting enough calcium: "In my 18 years practising dentistry, I've never seen tooth damage attributable to a lack of calcium. Yet each week I see about two new cases of tooth erosion due to acidic drinks — orange juice, cola, sports drinks, etc," he writes. And the Australian Dental Association agrees, describing the advertisement as "ridiculous and misleading".

AUSTRALIAN FRESH should be ashamed of itself: it's too clever for consumers' good.

4 YEAR INDEX

July 1998 — June 2002

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Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.
* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items or letters. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts, many other small pieces, and Recalls and Bans.

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PHOTOS: RHONDA TIWAITE

COLD comfort

Do alternative cold treatments work? We went looking for evidence ... and we're still searching.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **While some popular** *alternative cold remedies show promise, there are no miracle cures.*
- **Washing your hands** *with ordinary soap after contact with someone who has a cold will help prevent you getting one. The virus is easily spread on the hands.*

The colds season is upon us again, and with it the search for the golden panacea. Casting aside the conventional decongestants, expectorants and ephedrine 'feel-good' pills, many people prefer to go alternative, with popular remedies including echinacea, vitamin C, zinc and garlic. But do they work?

There've been numerous studies attempting to prove or disprove the effectiveness of alternative cold remedies, but unfortunately these trials are generally of low quality, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the effectiveness of the treatment.

As an example, there was a Cochrane review — the Rolls Royce of medical reviews — of research on echinacea. The reviewers found 40 studies on it, but only 14 fully met what are considered to be the minimum criteria for a good-quality study — and even these had problems.

Challenges for researchers are correctly diagnosing a cold or upper respiratory tract infection, especially in the early stages, and reliably measuring the severity of the symptoms. Studies are often criticised for having small numbers of participants and for not disguising the products to ensure the people giving them out and taking them don't know if they're a placebo or the 'real thing'. Then there are questions about all the unpublished papers: withheld for reasons of competition or because the results aren't in the interests of the organisation paying the bill.

Maybe you're tempted to bypass the so-called experts and just try something for yourself or ask your friends. However, there are over 100 cold viruses, and the symptoms, severity and duration of your cold depend to some extent on the type of virus as well as other (largely unknown) factors. If your cold symptoms are mild and short-lived, you'll never know if it was due to the treatment, or you just had a mild cold.

We reviewed the scientific evidence on a number of popular alternative remedies, and while some show promise, there are no miracle cures.

VITAMIN C

Vitamin C is an essential nutrient found in fresh fruit and vegetables, and plays an important role in tissue maintenance and repair. We need about 40 mg per day, and any excess amount is excreted.

In the sixties it was proposed that large quantities can prevent and treat colds, yet despite decades of research there's no clear-cut evidence one way or the other.

Evidence

A large Cochrane review was recently conducted, attempting to weigh up the evidence for and against vitamin C.

There's some evidence that taking a large dose (more than 1 gram per day) continuously or at the onset of a cold may cause a minor reduction in its severity and duration — on average making it about half a day shorter. It doesn't prevent you catching a cold.

Preventing a cold

Champion golfer Tiger Woods reckons the reason he gets so many colds and flu is because he has to shake hands with so many people.

While cold viruses can be transmitted in coughs and sneezes, you're probably more likely to get them from your hands. The viruses contaminate the hands of people with colds as a result of nose blowing, covering sneezes and touching their nose. They can then be spread directly (hand to hand contact) or indirectly (via objects and surfaces). If you touch your nose or eyes, you can become infected.

Washing your hands with ordinary soap after contact with someone who has a cold, and after touching objects or surfaces that may be contaminated (including those in public places), will help prevent a cold.

The common cold: facts and fallacies

- You don't have to have a weakened immune system to catch a cold — healthy people with a normal immune system are also highly susceptible to cold viruses.
- Not everyone who gets infected (meaning they have the virus growing in their nose) develops symptoms. But it's not known why this is so.
- Becoming cold or chilled doesn't cause a cold.
- You can catch a cold at any time of the year, but perhaps the reason they're more common in winter is because we spend more time indoors close to others.

Vitamin C proponents argue it's a lot more effective than this, but that you need a dose of 3 to 5 g to prevent a cold and 5 to 10 g to treat one. They also argue that studies that don't find in favour of Vitamin C use lower doses.

Negative effects

No adverse effects have been reported in any of the studies on Vitamin C and colds, although other research has shown high doses may give you diarrhoea and interfere with the metabolism of other nutrients, and may even lead to kidney stones.

Our verdict

Taking up to 1 g of vitamin C a day when you have a cold won't harm most people, so you can try it if it makes you feel better. Your wallet will feel worse, though, and for a cold that lasts only half a day less than usual, it may not be worth it.

ECHINACEA

Echinacea has long been used for respiratory infections by Native Americans, and until the introduction of sulphur antibiotics (which, like all antibiotics, are useless against viral infections) was the most common cold and flu remedy in the US. It's made a comeback in recent times, and in Germany, where herbal medicine is mainstream, as many as 1.3 million prescriptions are given out each year.

Evidence

A Cochrane Review found that some echinacea preparations may be better than taking a placebo or nothing for the prevention and treatment of colds.

A significant problem for the reviewers was the large variation in products. There are more than 200 preparations, which differ in terms of what they're made from (roots, herb or the whole plant), the species of echinacea (for example, *E. purpurea*, *E. pallida* or *E. augustifolia*), how the active ingredients are extracted, and whether they contain only echinacea or are combined with other active ingredients. This means the evidence for any one product is very limited, so it's impossible to recommend a specific product or dosage.

While you'd think it was in manufacturers' interests to do large-scale studies to prove their products work, this is a very expensive exercise that offers little benefit. Plant extracts can't easily be patented, so research results can be used by others and won't necessarily boost sales of the product that paid for the research.

Negative effects

Echinacea generally has a good safety record, although probably shouldn't be taken long-term (recommendations range from no more than eight weeks to three months continuously) because of some suspicions that it may affect the immune system, and people with an autoimmune disorder are warned against using it. It has caused allergic reactions, sometimes severe, in some people.

Our verdict

Because of the uncertainty about taking it long-term, don't use it every day all year round. But you could try it at the first sign of a cold — depending on the preparation, it may just help.

ZINC

Zinc is an essential nutrient that plays an important role in the maintenance of the immune system and cell growth and repair.

Many years ago, scientists discovered that it also interferes with the replication of rhinoviruses (viruses that cause colds) in lab tests, and reasoned it might also do so in the body, effectively reducing the severity of — if not curing — the common cold.

Today there's a range of zinc products on the market, including

lozenges, nasal sprays and ice blocks (for kids), in addition to the standard dietary supplements (some of which are promoted for preventing colds).

Evidence

Lozenges: Of 10 studies published, five found zinc lozenges had a positive effect (reduced the severity and/or duration of a cold) and the other five found they had no effect.

Nasal spray: Two published studies looked at zinc nasal spray as a treatment: one found it didn't help, one found it did. However, the spray that was found to help was a lot stronger — almost 50 times — than the one that didn't. A third study using zinc spray as a preventative measure found it didn't help.

So the evidence seems inconclusive. Since rhinoviruses hang around inside the nose, it makes theoretical sense that a nasal spray would work better than a lozenge. But it seems no-one has tested whether any zinc makes it from the mouth (by sucking lozenges) into the nasal passages — or at least it hasn't been reported.

Also there's doubt as to whether the zinc works by direct contact with the virus: the observation that zinc kills viruses in a Petri dish doesn't necessarily hold true when the viruses are in humans, and even in the Petri dish the effects are relatively small.

Obviously more high-quality studies could put the issue to rest but, like vitamin C and echinacea, there's no particular benefit for manufacturers in proving it works.

Negative effects

In doses high enough to have some reported effect, negative effects can include nausea, altered taste, dry mouth, abdominal pain and headache for lozenges, and a burning sensation for nasal spray. Whether they're better or worse than the cold is debatable. Taking doses of over 100 mg per day long-term can cause copper deficiency, impaired immunity, heart problems and anaemia.

Our verdict

You could try zinc at the first sign of a cold, though the evidence is shaky. But don't exceed the recommended dose.

GARLIC

Garlic is known to be useful in helping to prevent heart disease, and can kill germs. The active ingredient is thought to be allicin, which is formed when the garlic is crushed or cut.

Eating the recommended one to two cloves of raw garlic each day is rather daunting for many people, hence the proliferation of garlic tablets and powders. Unfortunately allicin breaks down pretty quickly after it's formed, requiring complex manufacturing processes to overcome the problem. But some manufacturers just produce a garlic product without it anyway.

The basis for garlic's use in preventing and treating colds is that it boosts the immune system (although this hasn't been proved, and even healthy people get colds). It's also antimicrobial, but only when it's put in direct contact with germs — eating it has no effect.

Evidence

Despite its popularity for both preventing and treating a cold, there's only been one recent study published on its effectiveness — conducted by the Garlic Centre in the UK. It found that taking a garlic supplement reduced the likelihood of getting a cold, and among those who did get colds, the duration was reduced.

Negative effects

Large amounts of raw garlic might cause stomach upsets, but preparations seem to be safe. You shouldn't take garlic without a doctor's advice if you're taking blood-thinning medication such as warfarin, heparin or aspirin.

Our verdict

It's impossible to make a recommendation on the basis of one study, particularly when its independence is questionable. Stuffing raw garlic up your nose to kill the virus isn't recommended, but eating it might help by keeping other people with colds at a distance.

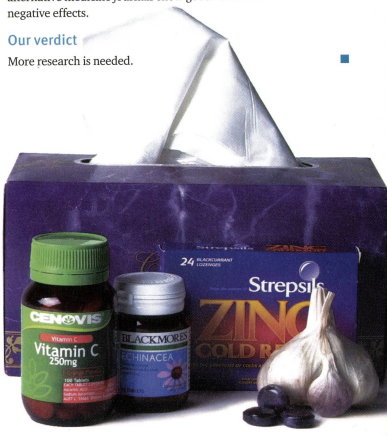
ANDROGRAPHIS

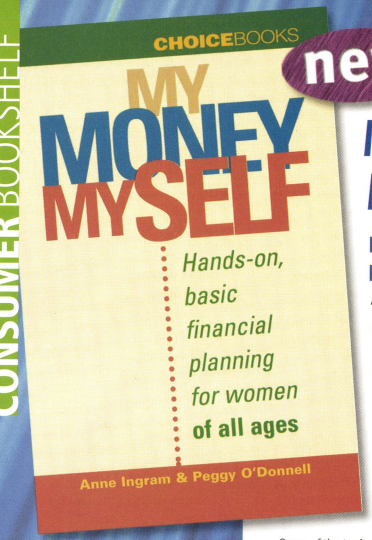
The new kid on the block is andrographis, although like most herbal medicines it's hardly 'new': it's been used in Indian ayurvedic medicine for thousands of years. It's also called Indian echinacea because it's believed to provide similar benefits.

Research on the herb has yet to hit the mainstream medical journals, although some studies reported in non-peer-reviewed alternative medicine journals show good results and no negative effects.

Our verdict

More research is needed.





new

MY MONEY, MYSELF

Hands-on, basic financial planning for women of all ages

Anne Ingram & Peggy O'Donnell

Why a money book for women?

Because on average:

- Women work fewer years than men.
- Women can expect to live longer in retirement than men.

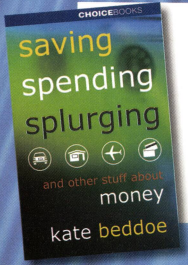
This means women need their income to grow faster to retire in comfort. And they need to learn to take control of their own finances.

My Money, Myself is a plain-English guide to understanding money for Everywoman. Armed with some basic knowledge about how economic society functions, you can become an active participant and manage your own money wisely, taking the helm and steering your own course.

Some of the topics covered include:

- Understanding superannuation, investment options and taxation.
- Managing credit, store, charge and debit cards.
- Travel, property, insurance and pensions.
- Advice on dealing with trades and salespeople.
- 'Fun' money — how to use it!

$22.00 CODE: MMMS



SAVING SPENDING SPLURGING

Whether you're 25 or 75, this book will help you get your finances under control.

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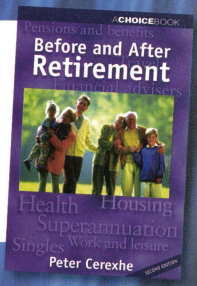
BEFORE AND AFTER RETIREMENT

Keep in touch with all the changing rules that could affect your retirement planning.

$27.50 CODE: BAR2



NATURAL GARDENING IN AUSTRALIA

Using these tried-and-true methods even the busiest of us can enjoy the tranquillity of gardening. This revised edition includes advice on designing a garden ecosystem, mulching, composting and no-dig gardens, with a special emphasis on water conservation and replacing toxic pesticides with effective natural ones.

$38.00 CODE: NGIA

BUYER BEWARE

Property writer and editor Terry Ryder has seen many aspects of property buying that have left him annoyed. Here he takes the reader on a house-of-horrors journey that exposes many shonky practices in the industry.

$19.95 CODE: BUYB

WHAT MAKES A CHAMPION!

In a country that loves a champion an often-asked question is: "What makes a champion — is it talent, training, determination, passion or something else?"

Here 50 champions from Nelson Mandela to Shane Gould, John Eales to Edmund Hillary, offer their opinions.

$23.00 CODE: WMAC

AGEFIT

Forget all about growing old gracefully or disgracefully, let's be realistic and talk about ageing *healthily*. *Agefit* is written by a team of Australian nutrition and fitness experts and presents clear, concise pointers to leading a healthier and more active life into your 70s, 80s and beyond.

$27.50 CODE: AGEF

INSPIRING ADVENTURES OVERSEAS

Do you feel it's time to go beyond the experiences of the mainstream tourism itinerary? Do you want to travel with a purpose? Read these inspiring travel stories, study the comprehensive special-interest travel directory, and you'll be on you way!

$29.95 CODE: IAOS

THE HOME PSYCHIATRIST

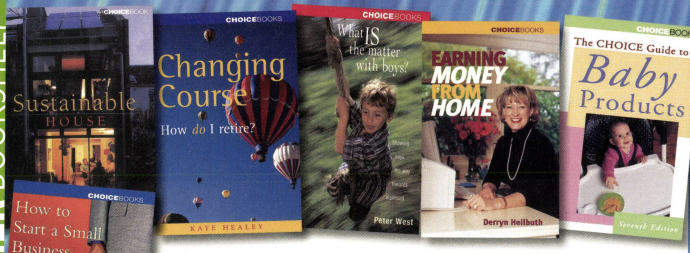
Not a medical textbook, but this book provides awareness of basic psychiatric processes for the general reader.

$19.95 CODE: HPSY

SPINNING AROUND: THE FESTIVAL RECORDS STORY

This accompanying book to the popular 'Spinning Around' exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney is a potted history of Australian popular music over the past 50 years. From JO'K to Kylie Minogue, they're all in here. Illustrated with over 60 colour and black-and-white pictures.

$16.95 CODE: SPIN



SUSTAINABLE HOUSE

A guide to creating an energy- and water-efficient home.

$35.00 CODE: SUSH

HOW TO START A SMALL BUSINESS IN THE REAL WORLD

Everything you need to know *before* starting a small business.

$22.00 CODE: SASB

THE CHOICE WINE BUYING GUIDE 2002

An essential and impartial guide to 400 affordable wines Australia drinks. "There are a lot of things I like about this book." Max Allen, *The Weekend Australian*

$30.00 CODE: WINE

CHANGING COURSE

This book will inspire you to see retirement or redundancy as a chance to change tack and try new things.

$22.00 CODE: CHCO

WHAT *IS* THE MATTER WITH BOYS?

"Offers practical techniques for coping with the 'pull-your-hair-out' challenge of raising sons to confident maturity." *Herald Sun*

$25.00 CODE: WTMB

EARNING MONEY FROM HOME

A practical guide to running your perfect business from home. "Highly readable...motivational as well as useful." *Herald Sun*

$25.00 CODE: EMFH

THE CHOICE GUIDE TO BABY PRODUCTS

The buying guide to products for your baby, plus a free copy of CHOICE's 2002 cot tests.

$20.00 CODE: CBP7

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DISPOSABLE RAZORS: *which ones cut it?*

Our Home Testers tried 23 to see if you need to pay a lot for a good one.

PHOTOS: BRENDA TRAVNITE

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Generally speaking,** *the more you spend the better razor you get.*
- **A rubberised handle,** *lubricating strip, pivot head and two or three blades help make shaving easier and more comfortable.*
- **Razors for sensitive skin** *weren't considered 'gentler' than regular razors.*

If you believe their ads, some disposable razors are more high-tech than the average space shuttle. But have you ever wondered if pivoting heads, rubber grip handles, lubricating strips and those little plastic cleaning thingies that push hairs out from between the blades do any good? Or even whether women really need a special women's razor and men a men's razor?

The best way to find out was to put our Home Testers on the job, trying and rating a total of 23 different models of disposable razors.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD RAZOR?

A close shave, manoeuvrability, easy gliding across the skin and a comfortable handle all helped a razor rate well overall.

- Generally speaking, **the more blades the better**. The top razor for both men and women was the triple-blade **SCHICK Xtreme III**, while all the single-blade razors rated below average. The main advantages of more than one blade seem to be better manoeuvrability and a closer shave. Women added that razors with more blades glided more easily over skin, needed fewer passes, caused fewer nicks and needed less cleaning.
- Razors for **sensitive skin** don't appear to be better than regular razors: women with sensitive skin found they were *more* likely to leave their skin feeling irritated and dry, while men with sensitive skin found they didn't give as close a shave or leave skin feeling as smooth as regular razors.
- People much preferred razors with a **pivot head** to a fixed head: they glided more easily over skin, were easier to manoeuvre and clean, and gave a closer shave. They also needed fewer passes to shave one spot and resulted in fewer nicks.
- Razors with a **lubricating strip** left skin feeling smooth or moisturised, and were less likely to leave skin feeling irritated.
- **Rubber grip** handles were more comfortable and made the razor easier to manoeuvre.
- Only three razors had a plastic **push-clean device** (the three from the **SCHICK EXTRA II** range), and men found this made cleaning easier. Women found no difference.
- Razors **marketed specifically for men or women** tended to be rated better by the target users than unisex razors, with the notable exception of the top-scoring **SCHICK XTREME III**, which is unisex. However, it's difficult to say whether this is because of differences in design, or in general quality.
- **Price** is a pretty good indicator of what people liked best — generally, the more you pay, the better the shave.

WHAT TO BUY

	Price per razor
Men and women	
SCHICK XTREME III	$1.96
Men	
GILLLETTE Blue II Plus Slalom	$0.80
GILLETTE Blue II Slalom	$0.68
SCHICK Extra II for Dry Skin	$0.65
Women	
GILLETTE Satin Care	$0.89
GILLETTE Super Thin II Sensitive	$0.38

Profiles

Prices shown are for one razor.

FOR MEN AND WOMEN

SCHICK XTREME III

Price: $1.96
Features: Three blades, pivot head, lubricating strip, rubber grip handle, contoured handle.
Overall score for men: 80%
Comments:
"I've never used such a marvellous piece of equipment for shaving." (John Spark — Junortown, Victoria)
"The only thing that stops me giving it full marks is the handle. While it's comfortable, the shape and size are a bit too bulky." (Brian O'Bree — Bendigo, Victoria)

PROFILES: RHONDA TYRWHITT

SCHICK XTREME III

See above for price and features
Overall score for women: 85%
Comments:
"This razor was not only nice to use but did an excellent job. This is the sort you'd use all the time, and I'd like to buy it in the future." (Hayley Hyland — Hobart)
"I thought this was exceptional." (Debbie Bertocchi — Perth)

FOR MEN

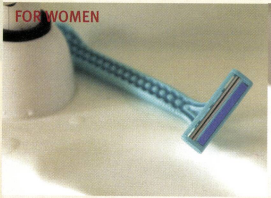
GILLETTE BLUE II PLUS SLALOM

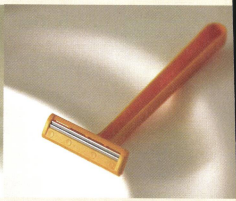
Price: 80 cents
Features: Two blades, pivot head, lubricating strip, rubber grip handle.
Overall score: 75%
Comments:
"Easy to hold, easy to clean, does all the awkward spots well." (D Stephens — Kilmore, Victoria)
"An easy to use shaver with good results." (Jim Leavy — Perth)

GILLETTE BLUE II SLALOM

Price: 68 cents
Features: Two blades, pivot head.
Overall score: 75%
Comments:
"Performed very well in most areas. Gave excellent shave results all round." (Ken Springer — Brisbane)
"Pivot head helps it to get to different areas more easily." (Tony Housden — Tamworth, NSW)

FOR WOMEN



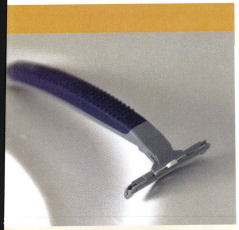


GILLETTE SATIN CARE

Price: 89 cents
Features: Two blades, lubricating strip, contoured handle.
Overall score: 85%
Comments:
"It's easy to hold and manoeuvre and it gave a very good shave quickly with no scratching." (Nadene Lemke — Goonellabah, NSW)
"This razor made shaving my legs very quick and easy. The moisturising strip worked well — legs felt great." (Judy Rybicki — Perth)

GILLETTE SUPER THIN II SENSITIVE

Price: 38 cents
Features: Two blades.
Overall score: 75%
Comments:
"Cannot fault it in any way whatsoever, more than pleased with the all-round shave." (Judith Watson — Melbourne)
"It was easier to use the razor on bigger surfaces and more difficult to manoeuvre it around angles (such as knees)." (Kathleen Meyer — Heatley, Queensland)



SCHICK EXTRA II FOR DRY SKIN

Price: 65 cents
Features: Two blades, rubber grip handle, push-clean blades, lubricating strip.
Overall score: 75%
Comments:
"A nice razor to use and easy to clean. It could have been a bit sharper and a pivot head would improve manoeuvrability." (D Stephens — Kilmore, Victoria)
"Great handle, best of all razors I've used, ever. All it needs is a better head/blade." (Bernard Alting — Canberra)

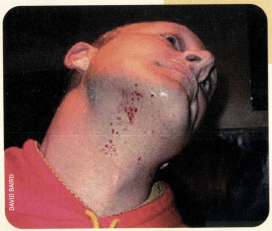
CHOICE HOME TESTER

How we tested

264 Home Testers put a total of 23 disposable razors through their paces. Men tried six marketed towards men and 10 unisex razors, and used them to shave their face. Women tried seven 'women's razors' and nine unisex, and used them to shave their legs only.

Nineteen people then tested the top-rated models to see how long they'd stay sharp. There wasn't much difference between them, and in most cases they lasted at least 10 shaves.

Many thanks to all our Home Testers for taking part in the trial. It wasn't all fun and games, as David Baird of Torquay, Victoria, can attest: not surprisingly, the razor responsible for this ranked among the lowest.


DAVID BAIRD

What about the rest?

Thre rest of the razors scored as follows:

FOR MEN	
BIC Softwin with Beard Softeners	70%
BIC Twin Select Sensitive Skin	70%
WILKINSON SWORD with Lubricating Strip	70%
WILKINSON SWORD Super Blue Twin	65%
SCHICK Extra II Regular	60%
BIC Twin Blade	55%
HOME BRAND Twin Blade	55%
SAVINGS Twin Blade	55%
BIC Shavers	50%
BIC Sensitive Skin	50%
GILLETTE Super Thin II Sensitive	50%
HOME BRAND Single Blade for Sensitive Skin	50%

FOR WOMEN	
BIC Softwin Lady	70%
GILLETTE for Women Daisy Plus	70%
GILLETTE for Women Daisy Ultragrip	70%
SCHICK Extra II for Women	70%
SCHICK Extra II Regular	70%
WILKINSON SWORD Lady Glide	65%
BIC Twin Blade	60%
HOME BRAND Twin Blade	60%
BIC Sensitive Skin	55%
SAVINGS Twin Blade	55%
BIC Lady Shavers	50%
BIC Shavers	50%
HOME BRAND Single Blade for Sensitive Skin	50%

DISPOSABLES vs REPLACEABLE CARTRIDGES

Australians went through 101 million disposable razors last year, amounting to 570 tonnes of plastic, metal and rubber waste. If we used replaceable-blade cartridge razors instead of disposables, we'd cut that waste by a massive 65%.

MORE INFORMATION

For what to look for in a dishwasher, see CHOICE, May 2001, or go to our website: www.choice.com.au (click on 'Dishwashers' in 'Top 10 reports'). If you don't have a copy of the May issue or web access, send a stamped (85 cents in NSW, 95 cents elsewhere), self-addressed A5 or larger envelope to Dishwashers, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, and we'll send you a photocopy.

What's better than chocolate and port to round off a good home-cooked meal? A dishwasher, of course, that takes care of your dishes while you enjoy the rest of the evening.

We tested six new models, and most of those we checked out last year are still on the market. The table on page 40 gives you a comprehensive overview of 23 dishwashers in rank order.

Prices range from around $750 to more than $2000 — but you don't necessarily get cleaner pots and pans for a higher price. One of the more expensive dishwashers did score best overall (85%), but the two most expensive models ranked surprisingly low, mainly because of their comparatively poor washing performance (the **MIELE Sensorplus G696SC** and **KLEENMAID BY BRANDT Super Silent System DW13W**).

However, both have a number of new features you might appreciate, such as the **MIELE**'s 'top solo' wash program that washes the top basket only, which can save energy and water if you only have a small load. And they're among the quietest to run.

Like some of the new-generation washing machines, these dishwashers can also work out which program to use. A turbidity sensor adjusts water consumption depending on how dirty your dishes are and decides by itself whether the load needs a prewash or extra rinses.

PACKED TOO TIGHT?

The **MIELE Sensorplus** and **KLEENMAID** — and a few others in the test — are classified as holding 14 place settings, instead of the usual 12. However, with the exception of the **ASKO D1606**, these 14-place models ranked in the lower half of the table. We test to the claimed capacity, but think most people probably wash a full 12 or 14-place setting in their dishwasher only occasionally, using it regularly with smaller loads and non-standard crockery pieces. Doing this, you

Dishwashing made

Tired of washing your dishes by hand, or thinking of updating your old dishwasher? Here's the latest on 23 models.

probably get better washing results than if you pack the machine to its claimed limit.

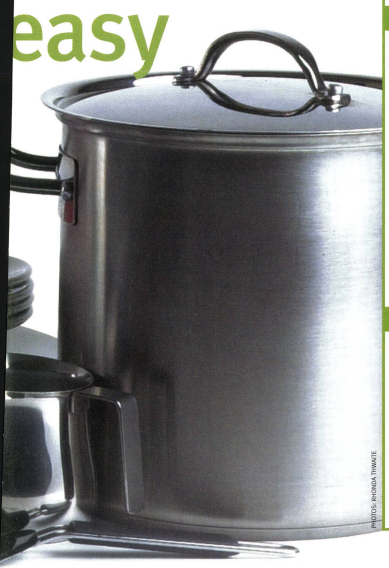
For example, we certainly got much better results for the **ARISTON LS 620 A** when we tested it with 12 place settings. When we learned that it had later been classified as a machine for 14 place settings, we retested it accordingly. In this test, it scored much lower for washing and drying performance.

For people with a disability

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre thought the **ASKO D1606** and **DISHLEX Global DX300WA** were suitable for people who have problems with their hands or wrists.

Both the **AEG**s would suit people who are vision-impaired, and the **DISHLEX DX100WA** those with an intellectual impairment.

If you have a disability, see our May 2001 report for what to look for in a dishwasher.



PHOTOS: RHONDA TIWAITE

WHAT TO BUY

Best performers

AEG Öko Favorit 6081	$1819
AEG Öko Favorit 4070	$1499

Best Buys

DISHLEX DX100WA	$749
FISHER & PAYKEL Nautilus 920 (WW)	$1020
WESTINGHOUSE Freestyle SB920WH	$899
DISHLEX Global DX300WA	$929

While the two **AEG**s are the best dishwashers tested overall, the Best Buys are good models whose purchase price and running costs combined are among the lowest in the test.

BRAND RELIABILITY

We're in the process of gathering new information on subscribers' experiences with the reliability of various brands of dishwasher and other appliances. It'll be published in an issue of CHOICE later this year.

Profiles of new models

The best performer and Best Buy from this latest test are profiled below. For profiles of the other models in the *What to buy* list, see CHOICE, May 2001. Prices are recommended or average retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2002. You may find cheaper prices by shopping around.

BEST PERFORMER

AEG ÖKO FAVORIT 4070

Price: $1499

GOOD POINTS

- Fits large plates side by side.
- Easy to use controls.
- Comparatively quiet.
- Comparatively cheap to run.
- Has a load sensor that adjusts water level and wash time automatically — a useful feature for saving water and energy when it's less than fully loaded.
- Has a water-softening system that may be useful in hard-water areas.
- Has a fault display to help you avoid unnecessary service calls.

BAD POINTS

- One of the more expensive models to buy of those tested.

BEST BUY

DISHLEX DX 100WA

Price: $749

GOOD POINTS

- Fast wash cycle (for recently used or slightly soiled dishes).
- Good basket layout.
- Easy to use controls, though with poor contrast on the dials.

BAD POINTS

- Comparatively noisy.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Washing score (%)	3 Drying score (%)	4 Ease of use score (%)	5 Energy efficiency score (%)	6 Water efficiency score (%)	7 Noise (dB)	8 co
AEG Öko Favorit 6081	85	82	94	90	76	84	47	69
AEG Öko Favorit 4070	81	72	98	75	83	82	46	65
ARISTON LS 2050 AWH **(A)**	77	78	81	73	73	77	52	72
ASKO D1606 **(A)**	77	77	86	70	68	77	49	75
DISHLEX DX100WA	77	74	90	77	75	71	54	71
BENDIX DWN31	76	71	85	63	82	81	54	66
FISHER & PAYKEL Nautilus 920 (WW)	76	80	75	68	75	74	49	71
OMEGA DW2002W	76	75	67	80	84	77	52	65
WESTINGHOUSE Freestyle SB920WH	76	83	77	68	61	79	54	79
DISHLEX Global DX300WA	75	81	67	70	81	69	52	68
SMEG SA622W	75	74	70	80	80	74	48	68
FISHER & PAYKEL Dishdrawer DD603WW	74	72	85	81	63	67	47	82
MIELE G641 Plus	72	68	68	78	84	75	43	65
ARISTON LS 620 AWH	71	62	64	84	90	80	54	61
LG LD-12AW2	71	68	74	62	81	74	50	67
MIELE Sensorplus G696Sc	71	62	93	85	62	63	40	81
WHIRLPOOL 6ADP951WH **(B)**	71	77	77	65	52	70	49	85
BLANCO BFDW650S	70	72	76	77	52	71	54	85
BOSCH SGS4072AU	70	70	80	48	70	70	45	74
SIMPSON Silencio 52B850WH	70	77	75	73	39	73	53	93
KLEENMAID BY BRANDT Super Silent System DW13W **(A)**	65	50	90	78	52	78	43	88
KLEENMAID BY BRANDT DW10W **(A)**	62	64	62	82	41	64	46	93

SIMILAR MODELS

The following models would score the same for performance as the models we tested (in *italics*), but some may be slightly different for ease of use because of different layout, features or controls. In some cases the difference is only the colour or finish.

- *AEG Öko Favorit 6081:* **608750VI** ($2199), **628ti** ($1859).
- *AEG Öko Favorit 4070:* **4270i** ($1609 metal, $1799 Alutec).
- *ARISTON LS 2050 AWH:* **LS 2050 AIX SS** ($1599), **LS V67** semi-integrated ($1699).
- *ARISTON LS 620 AWH:* **LS 620 AIX** ($1399).
- *ASKO D1606 (white):* **D1606** in stainless steel ($1399), **D1706** (white, $1539).
- *BENDIX DWN31:* **DWN41** ($1199).
- *BLANCO BFDW650S:* **BFDW670S** ($1535), **BFDW651** ($1775), **BFDW640W** ($1180), **BFDW640S** ($1405).
- *BOSCH SGS4072AU:* **SGU4025AU** ($1599).
- *DISHLEX DX100WA:* **DX100SA** ($799), **DX100KA** ($749), **DX150** ($749).
- *DISHLEX Global DX300WA:* **DX300SA** ($999), **DX450WA** ($999), **DX450KA** ($999), **DX450SA** ($1049), **DX500WA** ($1149), **DX500KA** ($1149), **DX500SA** ($1199).
- *FISHER & PAYKEL Nautilus 920 (WW):* **920 (BK)** ($1057), **920 (SS)** ($1183).
- *FISHER & PAYKEL Dishdrawer DD603WW double-drawer:* **DD603SS** ($1886), **DD603i** ($1822); single-drawer: **DS603WW** ($988), **DS603SS** ($1112), **DS603i** ($1042).
- *KLEENMAID by BRANDT Super Silent System DW13W:* **DW13X** ($2449), **DW14i** ($2799).
- *KLEENMAID BY BRANDT DW10W:* **DW10X** ($1859), **DW12i** ($1979).
- *LG LD-12AW2:* **LG LD-12AS1** ($1469; will be discontinued in August).
- *MIELE G641 Plus:* **G641i Plus** ($1599), **G641Sc Plus** ($1499), **G641Sci Plus** ($1699).
- *MIELE Sensorplus G696Sc:* **G698Sc Plus** ($2699), **G896Sci Plus** ($2399), **G898Sci Plus** ($2899).
- *OMEGA DW2002W:* **DW2002X** ($1390).
- *SIMPSON Silencio 52B850WH:* **52B850SH** ($849), **WESTINGHOUSE Silhouette SB905** ($779).
- *SMEG SA622W:* **SA622X** ($1670), **SA627X** ($1199), **PL622X** ($1445).
- *WESTINGHOUSE Freestyle SB920WH:* **Freestyle SB920SA** ($949), **Freestyle SB921WA** ($999), **Freestyle SB921KA** ($999), **Freestyle SB921SA** ($1049), **Virtuoso SB922SA** ($1149), **SIMPSON Silencio 52B950WH** ($849), **Silencio 52B980WH** ($949), **Silencio 52B980SH** ($999).
- *WHIRLPOOL 6ADP951WH:* **6ADG952** ($1699), **6ADP962WH** ($1299), **6ADP962IXM** ($1399), **6ADP2956IXM** ($1499).

			FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS							
gy)*	Water used (L)*	Cycle time (minutes)*	9 Height-adjustable top basket	10 Foldable / removable tines	11 Anti-flood device	12 Concealed element	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)**	13 Water connection	Place settings	14 Type	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)***
	16	90	✓ (C)	R	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 61	H or C	12	FW, FI, SI	3	Germany	Andi-Co	1819
	17	95			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 61	H or C	12	FW	3	Germany	Andi-Co	1499
	19	103	✓	F	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 61	H or C	12	FW, SI	5	Italy	Arisit	1499
	19	100			✓		84 x 60 x 62	H or C	14	BI, FW, FI	2 (G)	Sweden	Asko	1299
	21	96	✓		✓		83 x 60 x 62	H or C	12	BI	1 (H)	Australia	Electrolux	749
	17	101	✓		✓		85 x 60 x 62	C rec	12	FW	ns	Italy	Bendix Appliances	1099
	20	81		R	✓		84 x 60 x 56	H or C	12	BI	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	1020
	19	78	✓ (C)		✓		85 x 60 x 63	H or C	12	FW	2	Italy	Omega / Smeg	1280
	18	89	✓	R	✓		82 x 60 x 63	H or C	12	BI, F, M	1	Australia	Electrolux	899
	22	94	✓	R	✓		82 x 60 x 62	H or C	12	BI, F	2 (J)	Australia	Electrolux	929
	20	80	✓ (C)		✓		82 x 60 x 61	H or C	12	BI, SI	2	Italy	Omega / Smeg	1555
	23	109	na	R	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 63	C rec	14	BI, FI	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	1766
	20	107		F, R (D)	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 62	C rec	14	FW, SI	2	Germany	Miele	1399
	18	133	✓		✓		86 x 60 x 63	H or C	14	FW	5	Italy	Arisit	1299
	20	65	✓	F		✓	85 x 60 x 62	H or C	12	FW	2	Korea	LG	1129
	24	117	✓	F, R (D)	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 61	C rec	14	FW, SI	2	Germany	Miele	2199
	21	98	✓	R	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 63	H or C	12	F, FW, FI	2	Germany	Whirlpool	1149
	21	99	✓	R	✓		85 x 60 x 63	C rec	12	FW	2	Italy	MEA	1460
	21	109	✓	(E)		✓	85 x 60 x 62	C rec	14	FW	2	Germany	Bosch	1099
	20	89	✓	R	✓		82 x 60 x 63	H or C	12	BI, F, M	1	Australia	Electrolux	749
	18	90	✓	F	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 63	C rec	14	F	5	France	Kleenmaid	2299
	24	88				✓	85 x 60 x 62	C rec	14	FW	5	France	Kleenmaid	1579

* *On a 'normal' cycle.*

** *Dimensions (rounded up to the next centimetre) are for the smallest 'box' you could place around the machine, allowing for inlet and drain hoses. It's best to leave extra space around the machine for easy installation and air circulation.*

*** *Prices are recommended or average retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2002.*

ns *Not stated.*

na *Not applicable; the Dishdrawer comes as one or two separate drawers. We tested the two-drawer model; the single-drawer model will use half as much water and energy.*

(A) *Model replaced but you may still find it in shops.*

(B) *This and similar models will be replaced in August/September.*

(C) *Only height-adjustable on right-hand side.*

(D) *The large plate tines are removable and the mid-size plate tines are foldable.*

(E) *The tines aren't removable, but you can add a cup rack to the lower basket.*

(G) *10 years parts and labour for all stainless steel, 20 years for PEX inlet safety hose.*

(H) *Post-warranty plan available in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra and Hobart.*

(J) *10 years parts and two years labour for stainless steel interior.*

1 Overall score

This is a combination of the following scores, weighted as follows:

- Washing score: 40%
- Drying score: 20%
- Ease of use score: 10%
- Energy efficiency score: 15%
- Water efficiency score: 15%

2 to 7 Other scores/figures

See the notes with the table in the May 2001 article for information on what was tested and measured to achieve these scores and figures.

8 Running costs

This is an estimate of how much it'll cost you over 10 years (the average life of a dishwasher) for water and electricity, if you wash one full load every day using a 'normal' cycle. The calculations are based on 12.5 cents per kWh for electricity and $1 per 1000 L for water.

9 Height-adjustable top basket

If the top basket is height-adjustable, you can set it to fit long-stemmed glasses in the top or extra-large plates in the bottom basket.

10 Foldable/removable tines

Being able to remove some of the tines in a basket allows you to fit in larger items such as pots and pans more easily. Some tines can be folded for extra versatility.

11 Anti-flood device

This activates the water supply valve and the drain pump if there's a water leak in the machine.

12 Concealed heating element

A concealed heating element prevents items like plastics from damage if they fall through the basket, and food residue from being burnt onto the element, causing a bad smell. However, models with a concealed element may need a fan to assist drying and tend to be more expensive.

13 Water connection

H or C: You can connect the machine to either hot or cold water.

C rec: The manufacturer recommends connection to the cold tap; the dishwasher will heat the water.

14 Types available

FW: Freestanding with worktop.

F: Freestanding without worktop.

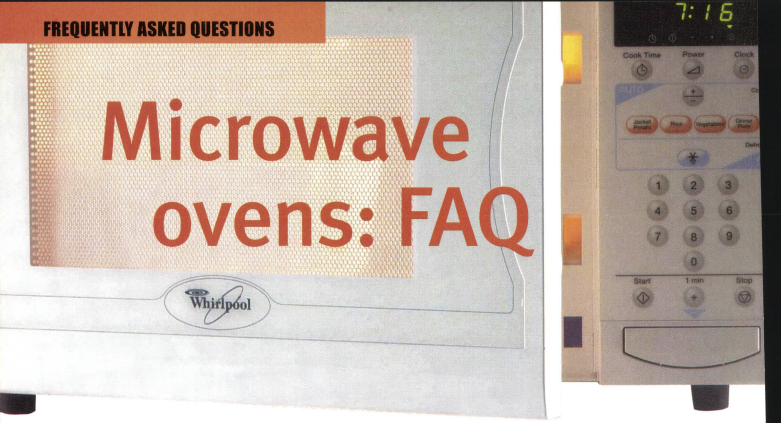
BI: Built-in (may not have side, top or back panels).

FI: Fully integrated (built-in, with decor panels from top to bottom — you have to open the door to access controls).

SI: Semi-integrated (built-in, with decor panels, but controls showing).

M: Mobile kits are available for these models.

Microwave ovens: FAQ



We answer your questions about microwave safety, the effects on food and how to cook effectively in one.

How do microwave ovens work?

Microwave radiation is generated in an electronic tube called a magnetron, and passes along what's called a waveguide into the oven cavity. The microwaves are reflected by metal, can pass through glass, paper, plastic and similar materials, and are absorbed by foods — characteristics that make them ideal for cooking.

The microwaves penetrate about 10 to 15 mm into the food and cause water molecules to vibrate, creating heat that cooks the food.

How does microwaving affect the nutrient value of food compared with other methods of cooking?

Microwave cooking is more nutritious than boiling as nutrients aren't lost into the cooking water. In this respect it's comparable to steaming or baking, and perhaps better as the shorter cooking times may preserve more of certain nutrients.

How do I make sure microwaved food is cooked or hot enough?

Different foods cook differently, so there can be uneven heating — cold spots and hot spots — in a microwaved meal.

It's important either to stir partway through cooking or let food stand for the recommended time to prevent wide temperature variations. Letting food stand gives the heat time to distribute evenly throughout the dish — this is particularly important for solid or dense dishes like lasagne, quiche and roasts that can't be stirred to help heat distribution.

Another way to get more even temperatures is to divide food into individual portions and to stir or turn it frequently. Uniformly shaped food cooks more evenly than irregular shapes.

Does microwaving influence the taste or appearance of food?

Depending on what you cook, it can taste just as good, better or worse than if cooked conventionally. Microwaving is great for fresh vegetables and fruits as you need less water, which can dilute the natural flavour. Shorter cooking times can also help retain flavour.

On the other hand, some food (like meat) fails to develop its appetising brown crust and nutty flavour, generally because it's cooked for periods too short or at temperatures too low to bring about the chemical reaction that causes browning.

You can use a special browning dish in the microwave to replicate the look and taste of roasted food, or try basting it with seasonings containing natural food colours (such as soy sauce), although it might not taste quite the same.

Can food-poisoning bacteria survive microwaving?

Microwaves don't kill bacteria, but heat produced by them does. At least 70°C has to be maintained for several minutes to kill most food-poisoning bacteria. The trouble is that microwaves can cook some foods unevenly, and bacteria can survive in the cool spots — see *How do I make sure microwaved food is cooked or hot enough?*, below left, for how to avoid this problem.

Is a microwave oven suitable for warming infant milk?

With care. Severe scalding could occur if there were hot spots in the bottle — always let the milk stand for at least 20 seconds, shake it well and test it first. Overheated breast milk can coagulate (curdle) at high temperatures, causing loss of quality and nutritional value.

Can I cook eggs in the microwave?

Eggs can be microwaved with good results, but you have to take care:

- You can't cook an egg in its shell — pressure builds from steam being created inside, and makes the egg explode.
- Pierce an egg yolk before cooking it, or the membrane will explode under steam pressure.
- You can microwave eggs that are already hard-boiled, but take care with the yolk — because it contains fat, it heats more quickly than the white, so even if the white doesn't seem very hot, the yolk could be hot enough to burn you.

Does food cooked in a microwave, or the oven itself, retain any radiation?

Microwave radiation is non-ionising, so it doesn't alter the atomic structure of the matter it passes through — unlike x-rays, ultraviolet rays or nuclear radiation — and has nothing to do with radioactivity. The microwaves stop being produced once the power to the oven's magnetron is switched off. They don't remain in the food and nor do they make either the food or the oven radioactive.

Why is it so important that microwaves don't leak radiation?

It's known that exposure to high levels of microwave radiation can cause burns, cataracts and temporary sterility in men — but these levels are much higher than those used in microwave ovens. Unfortunately we don't know much about human exposure to low levels, and studies with animals are inconclusive. But it makes sense to err on the side of caution.

All the microwaves in CHOICE tests are checked for leaking radiation and we've never found any leaks.

However, if your oven is damaged in any way — for example, if rust develops on the door grille or in the oven cavity, the door seal becomes loose or out of alignment or the mesh on its window is damaged — there's a danger of radiation leakage, so have it checked by the manufacturer or an approved service agent.

How does the microwave (in particular the door) stop microwaves from passing through?

The oven is lined with metal, which reflects microwaves. The door has a metal mesh, and since the waves are wider than the holes, they can't pass through.

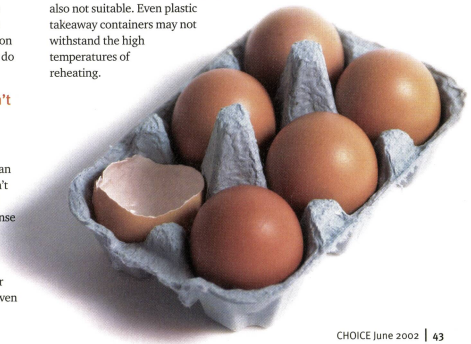
What's superheating? How can I avoid it?

Water heated in a microwave oven can sometimes heat past its boiling point without bubbles forming. Then when you move the cup or add coffee, for example, the water can explode into steam and cause scalding. To prevent this:

- Use a wide-mouthed container, preferably with the top wider than the bottom.
- Let it stand for about 20 seconds after it's heated.
- The risk is greatly reduced if you add sugar or instant coffee before heating.
- Check your instruction manual for more hints on avoiding superheating.

What plastic containers can I use in a microwave oven? Will chemicals from plastic packaging materials migrate into the food?

They can do, which is why it's best to use only plastics designed for microwave cooking: look for labels saying 'microwave-safe' or 'suitable for microwaves'. Don't use food containers that are designed to package frozen or chilled foods (such as ice cream or margarine) — the low melting temperatures of these plastics may leave contaminants in the food, or cause the containers to melt or disintegrate. Melamine plastics are also not suitable. Even plastic takeaway containers may not withstand the high temperatures of reheating.



If you're using plastic film, don't put it in direct contact with the food. Alternatively, use microwave-safe paper towel to prevent food splattering.

Are aluminium foil and foil containers safe for use in a microwave oven?

As a rule, you shouldn't use metals in microwaves — there's a danger of arcing (sparks or static discharge that can damage the oven's interior) if the metal container gets too close to the oven's walls.

However, if used correctly aluminium foil won't harm the oven — it's best to check the instructions that come with your oven for recommendations. For example, foil can be used to shield parts of food that would otherwise overcook, such as the tips of wings or legs of poultry.

Some foil containers can be used in microwaves made since 1980. However, you may need to cook food a little longer than usual, as the microwaves only enter from the top. Use shallow trays and make sure they're at least two-thirds full. Cover with microwave-safe plastic or a plate, not foil or a foil-lined lid.

To prevent arcing, the foil mustn't touch other metal, such as the oven sides, or other containers (heat only one container at a time).

To be on the safe side, it's probably best to check with your oven's manufacturer for any contrary or additional advice.

What other cookware can I use in a microwave oven?

- Heatproof glass or Pyrex cookware is perfect for use in microwaves, but be careful with glass containers not specifically labelled as microwave-safe.
- The packaging for microwavable convenience meals is designed for use at high temperatures and may use (metal) 'susceptors' to enhance browning or crisping and improve texture. This packaging isn't designed for frequent reheating, so don't reuse it for microwaving other food.
- Never use thin plastic storage bags, newspapers, or brown paper or plastic grocery bags in a microwave oven. White paper plates are OK for dry foods and plastic plates for warming (but not cooking) food.
- Microwave-safe plastic wraps, wax paper, cooking bags, parchment paper, and white microwave-safe paper towels should be OK.
- China, pottery, earthenware and ceramic containers may be suitable as long as they're non-porous and don't have a metal trim.

Container shape can also be a factor in how a food reacts to heating. Circular or oval containers, rather than square or rectangular, help food to cook evenly — lessening the chance of burning the edges. Shallow containers tend to provide a wider surface area, so are good for heating food.

How can I check whether a container not labelled 'microwave-safe' is suitable?

Three-quarters fill a small microwave-safe bowl with cold water and put it in the container you want to test, then put that in the microwave. Heat on high for 1 to $1^1/_2$ minutes. Test the temperature of the water, bowl and container:

- If the water's hot, the bowl warm and the outer edges of the container are cold, the container is safe for microwave use.
- If the container's hot, some microwave energy has been absorbed, making it unsuitable.
- If arcing occurs, stop the oven immediately and remove the container.

What difference does wattage make?

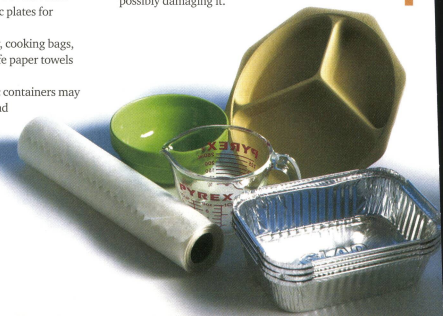
It's useful to know the wattage of your oven if you're using a recipe or other cooking instructions, because this determines cooking times needed. Food will cook faster on 'high' in a higher-wattage oven — which is particularly useful for heating drinks. On the other hand, food is also more likely to be overcooked or dried out. If you have a new microwave it might take a bit of trial and error to find the right cooking times compared with your old model.

In general, how do microwaves compare to gas and electric ovens for energy efficiency?

During conventional cooking, around three-quarters of the heat produced ends up warming water, air or oil rather than cooking your food. Microwave cooking is far more efficient, saving you money and reducing the environmental impact of your cooking.

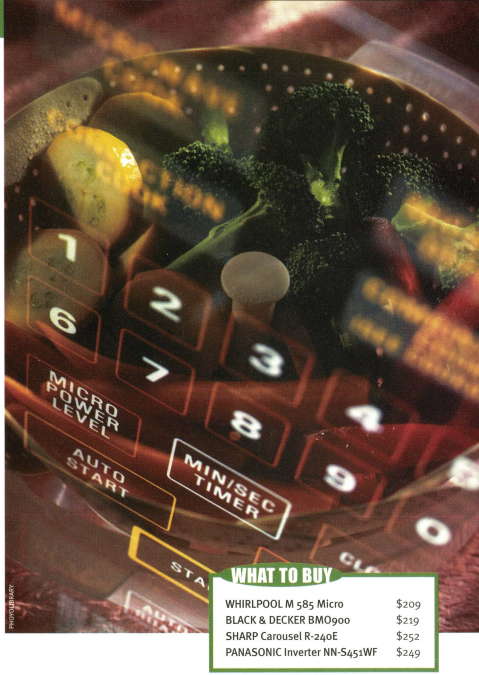
Is there a problem if the microwave accidentally gets switched on while it's empty?

Yes. When a microwave's cooking food, electrons move back and forth inside the magnetron to create the microwaves, which then travel down to the cooking chamber to heat the food. If there's no food (or water), the microwaves can be reflected back to the magnetron, possibly damaging it. ■



Mini MICROS

You may have trouble fitting a large chicken or casserole dish into one of these ovens, but they could be fine for a small household.



PHOTOLIBRARY

IN A NUTSHELL

- **These small microwaves** *do a pretty good job, although some have more cooking programs than others.*
- **Some microwaves** *don't heat non-stirrable food very evenly, resulting in cooler spots that could harbour food-poisoning bacteria.*

WHAT TO BUY

WHIRLPOOL M 585 Micro	$209
BLACK & DECKER BMO900	$219
SHARP Carousel R-240E	$252
PANASONIC Inverter NN-S451WF	$249

On test: six microwaves with a 20–25 litre capacity — the most popular size these days. Although small, they have a reasonable number of cooking programs. All those tested have auto-defrost functions and most have automatic cooking and reheating options, but none offers sensor cooking (where the microwave senses from the vapours in the oven when a food is ready).

All did a good job with the functions they have, although only two — the **BLACK & DECKER** and **WHIRLPOOL** — did well in the test for even reheating of food that can't be stirred (like lasagne). The **PANASONIC** wasn't too bad, but the rest produced large variations in temperature, which could mean that, without a little care on your part, some parts of solid food won't be hot enough to be safe. See *Microwave ovens: FAQs*, page 42, for more on the importance of evenly heated food and what you can do to make sure your food's properly cooked.

You'd probably be happy with one of the models in the *What to buy* list if you're not after anything fancy and have a small household — large dishes simply won't fit in the ovens. You might also find one handy for the holiday house or caravan.

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

Of the models in the *What to buy* list, the following are recommended if you have:

- **Impaired vision**

The **BLACK & DECKER** and **WHIRLPOOL** models are best: controls are large and clear and the digital display is bright.

- **Cognitive impairment**

The symbols, labels and digital display of the **BLACK & DECKER** are clearly labelled so that the meaning's obvious, and the timer function is easy to program. The **SHARP** is also good and has pictures for the cooking controls.

- **Weak hands or fingers**

The **PANASONIC's** door release is large and the door is easy to open. Like the rest of the models, though, you need some finger pressure to operate the pushbutton controls.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE					5 PROGRAMS AND FEATURES				
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Cooking score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 10-year running costs ($)	4 10-year energy costs on standby ($)	Auto cook	Auto reheat	Auto defrost	Quick / boosted start	Adjust during cook
WHIRLPOOL M 585 Micro	79	84	67	70	41	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BLACK & DECKER BMO900	78	82	68	78	33			✓	✓	
SHARP CAROUSEL R-240E **(A)**	78	82	69	51	15	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PANASONIC INVERTER NN-S451WF	77	77	75	64	25	✓	✓	✓		
SANYO EM-N109	72	74	67	70	32			✓	✓	
NEC N-728E	69	70	67	67	37	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

1 Overall score

The overall score is made up as follows:

- Cooking score: 70%
- Ease of use score: 30%

2 Cooking score

The cooking score is based on the following tests, all weighted equally:

- Automatic defrosting of a chicken.
- Automatic defrosting of mince.
- Manual defrosting of a chicken.
- Manual defrosting of mince.
- Manual cooking of broccoli.
- Manual reheating of a typical meal on a plate.
- Manual reheating of food that can't be stirred.

We also tested auto cooking of broccoli on those models that have the function. See the table, *Cooking performance*, right, for all the individual cooking scores.

3 Ease of use score

This is based on the ease of using controls, cleaning and visibility inside the microwave while cooking.

4 10-year running costs

This is the cost of reheating a meal once a day plus standby energy consumption over a 10-year period. We've also pulled out the standby energy costs into a separate column: in most cases they make up a high proportion of the overall costs — mainly just to keep the clock running.

5 Programs and features

See *What to look for*, below, for more on these.

6 Power output

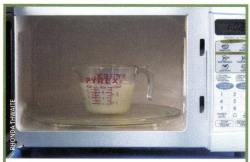
The measured output was higher than the claimed for all tested models. See *What to look for* for what this means in practice.

7 Volume

The claimed volume is that given by manufacturers and is the total internal volume of the microwave, including corners that you can't use. The usable volume is the amount of space you can use: essentially a cylinder with the diameter of the turntable and the oven's height.

TESTER'S TIP

Keep the walls and ceiling of your microwave clean and your food will cook faster. Heating a bowl of water in the microwave will make spatters and splashes easier to wipe off.



This one-cup measuring jug gives a sense of the small space inside these microwaves — not enough for large cookware (the table gives their actual usable dimensions).

What to look for

- **The basics:** Easy-to-use controls and instructions, a bright light and large, clear viewing window. Make sure it's big enough to fit your microwave-safe cooking dishes. You need about 10 cm of space around the outside of the oven for ventilation.
- **Automatic functions** for defrosting, cooking and reheating may be convenient if you cook the foods covered in the programs. Automatic defrost features usually allow you to enter the weight and type of food, and the oven calculates the time.
- **Quick/boosted start:** A handy way of starting the oven, usually by pressing a single button. With some models you can increase the cooking time in one or half-minute steps by pressing the button again.
- **Adjust time during cooking:** Allows you to increase or decrease the time programmed during cooking.
- **Multi-stage programming:** On all models in this test, the oven can be programmed to perform a sequence of functions: for example, defrost, cook, then leave to stand.
- **Child safety lock:** All the models on test allow you to enter a sequence of numbers to deactivate the microwave. It's also handy when you're cleaning the controls — but you could just open the door.
- **Power:** Generally speaking, the higher the wattage, the faster the food cooks. However, we've found in testing that the claimed wattage is often different from the actual power output, so don't put too much faith in the numbers.

In this test, all models had a higher output wattage than claimed. While in theory this may mean you need less time than stated in a recipe to cook foods, the microwave used to determine that cooking time may also have had a higher or lower wattage than claimed. The best advice is to check the food while it's cooking and use the times only as a guide.

SPECIFICATIONS

age rning	6 Power output stated / measured (W)	External dimensions (H x W x D, cm)*	Internal height / turntable diameter (cm)	7 Volume, claimed / usable (L)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)**
	850 / 940	30 x 49 x 35	20 / 30	22 / 14	2	China	Whirlpool	209
	900 / 970	30 x 50 x 36	20 / 32	23 / 16	1	China	Mistral	219
	800 / 880	29 x 46 x 36	18 / 29	24 / 12	1	Thailand	Sharp	252
	1000 / 1070	30 x 51 x 38	19 / 32	23 / 16	1 **(B)**	China	Panasonic	249
	800 / 910	29 x 45 x 36	21 / 27	20 / 13	1 **(C)**	China	Sanyo	189
	800 / 900	28 x 46 x 35	20 / 28	20 / 12	1	Korea	NEC	179

* *Depth includes handle at front and mouldings at rear but not spacers, which keep the microwave at a safe minimum distance from a wall.*

** *Prices are recommended retail, based on information provided by manufacturers in March 2002.*

(A) *This model will be discontinued in July 2002.*

(B) *Plus an optional two or four years, for a fee.*

(C) *Plus an additional year if it needs repair during the first year.*

COOKING PERFORMANCE

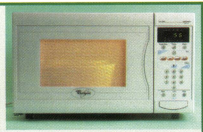
	Auto defrost chicken (%)	Auto defrost mince (%)	Auto cook broccoli (%)	Manual defrost chicken (%)	Manual defrost mince (%)	Manual cook broccoli (%)	Manual reheat typical meal (%)	Manual reheat non-stirrable food (%)
WHIRLPOOL M 585 Micro	90	91	100	80	70	100	90	67
BLACK & DECKER BMO900	80	100	na	60	62	100	100	74
SHARP CAROUSEL R-240E	90	85	100	90	92	100	80	34
PANASONIC NN-S451WF	60	92	100	80	81	80	90	59
SANYO EM-N109	90	100	na	70	60	100	80	19
NEC N-728E	90	46	80	80	40	100	100	31

na *Not applicable: the microwave doesn't have this as an automatic function.*

Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. Prices shown are recommended retail.

WHIRLPOOL M 585 MICRO



Price: $209

GOOD POINTS

- Generally good to excellent cooking scores (see the *Cooking performance* table, above), with one of the two best scores for heating non-stirrable food.

BAD POINTS

- Poor visibility during operation.

SHARP CAROUSEL R-240E

Price: $252

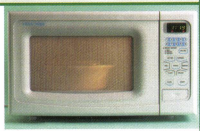
GOOD POINTS

- Comprehensive instruction booklet includes cooking guide and recipes.
- Good visibility.

BAD POINTS

- Low score for manual reheating of non-stirrable food.
- LCD display not very easy to read.
- Dirt can accumulate inside the cavity of the door handle, which can be difficult to clean.

BLACK & DECKER BMO900



Price: $219

GOOD POINTS

- One of the two best scores for heating non-stirrable food.
- The equal-largest usable volume of the models tested.

BAD POINTS

- No cooking guide.
- No auto cook and reheat functions.
- Poor visibility during operation.
- Dirt can become trapped around the control panel, which may be difficult to clean.

PANASONIC INVERTER NN-S451WF

Price: $249

GOOD POINTS

- Comprehensive instruction booklet includes cooking guide and recipes.
- The equal-largest usable volume of the models tested.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing in particular.

PROFILES: RHONDA THWAITE

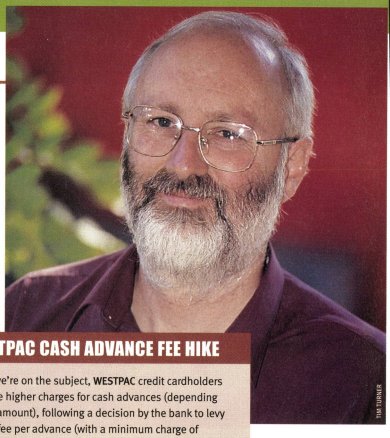
Transfer your balance, lose interest-free days

When Peter Flanagan received the first statement on his new Visa card he was puzzled: "Interest was charged on a cash advance, but I knew I hadn't made one," he says.

After studying Peter's statement we found that he'd transferred the balance he owed on his old credit card to his new card.

Of the major banks, **ANZ**, **NATIONAL AUSTRALIA BANK** and **WESTPAC** usually treat this as a cash advance and so immediately charge interest on it. However, at least they don't charge you a cash advance fee. **COMMONWEALTH** treats it as a normal purchase, so you get your interest-free days.

So if you want to transfer your old balance to a new credit card with interest-free days, check how it'll be treated.



TIM STENNER

WESTPAC CASH ADVANCE FEE HIKE

While we're on the subject, **WESTPAC** credit cardholders can face higher charges for cash advances (depending on the amount), following a decision by the bank to levy a 1.5% fee per advance (with a minimum charge of $2.50) from June 1, 2002.

The move follows a similar change by **ANZ** last year. **WESTPAC** customers already pay between 13.95% and 16.65% interest on their credit card from the time of any cash advance.

Like **ANZ**, **WESTPAC** has recently been trying to portray itself as more responsive to its customers' needs. This decision shows how far it has to go before those needs are placed before profit.

Major coup for mums and dads

Three cheers for the lawyer who took on major stockbroking firm Hartleys (formerly Hartley Poynton) in the Victorian Supreme Court recently and won over $1 million damages for a small investor.

The landmark judgment found that the broker made false, misleading and reckless promises, and the company acted against the interests of the client by misrepresentation, deception and manipulation. As a result the elderly client lost his whole investment.

Hartleys may appeal the decision, but this case ought to make all brokers take much better care of their small clients' needs. It's encouragement for any small investor to seek legal advice if you think you've lost money as a result of a broker's misleading or reckless conduct.

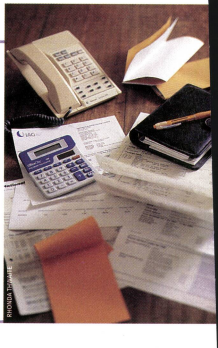
Love your paperwork

Easier said than done, but it may avoid getting into trouble.

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) recommends never giving a financial adviser total control of your investments. It advises you to:

- Keep all records.
- Follow it up if you don't get reports.
- Get all correspondence sent directly to you.
- Never give your adviser an open-ended general power of attorney.
- Make sure all instructions are in writing.

For more information call the ASIC infoline on 1300 300 630, or check www.fido.asic.gov.au.



RHONDA TURNBULL

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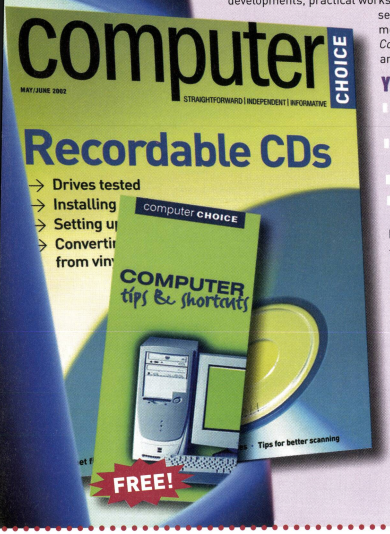

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To register, just call us on (02) 9577 3399 and have your email address ready. It's easy — don't miss out!

The website has more information than even CHOICE itself — items that lend themselves better to the web medium than to print, and some that are simply extra content. To whet your interest, here are some picks from **www.choice.com.au**

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recalls&bans

*Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: **www.recalls.gov.au**. If you don't have web access, try your local library, or phone the Safety Policy Unit on (02) 6263 2747.*

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

THE PRODUCT: Groupe Sportif has recalled after-market **Ergopost 3 road seatposts for bicycles** in sizes TS1, TS2 and TL.
The problem: Aluminium parts may break and cause the rider to lose control of the bike.
What to do: Don't use it. Return it to an authorised Look dealer for replacement, call (03) 9888 9882 or email help@groupesportif.com.

THE PRODUCT: Coast to Coast Imports has recalled **Action Archery Playsets** with a 56 cm long yellow archer's bow plus three 36 cm long red arrows tipped with soft suction cups — product code 933004900533, sold through discount stores in NSW from August 2001 to November 2001 (inclusive).
The problem: The arrows are an eye hazard.
What to do: Take them away from children. Return the set to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call (08) 9444 3000.

THE PRODUCT: Rose Valley Cheese Company has recalled **Romano Cheese Wheels** — 2 to 2.5 kg cheese wheels covered with a plastic emulsion brush-on coating, sold from February 11 to 16, 2002, by the factory outlet in south-east Perth, WA.
The problem: It may be contaminated with *E coli*.
What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the factory for a refund or call (08) 9399 2055.

THE PRODUCT: Penguin Books Australia has recalled **Monsters in the Closet** books made of heavy cardboard, featuring characters from the Monsters Inc film and a hanging-hole at the top of the back cover, ISBN 0-7214-2547-X and sold by Target, Fosseys and Target Country stores from October 2001 to March 18, 2002.
The problem: The ribbon and press-stud could come off and pose a choking hazard.
What to do: Don't use it. Return it to one of the above stores for a refund or call (03) 9871 2566.

THE PRODUCT: Heinz Wattie's Australasia has recalled 220 g cans of **Heinz Toddler Chicken Casserole** (use by 09.09.04) and of **Heinz For Baby Chicken Casserole From 9 Months** (use by 11.09.04); both have batch codes on the can ends starting with 2541.
The problem: Air may have entered the cans and affected food quality.
What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call 1800 654 500.

THE PRODUCT: Manassen Foods Australia has recalled 150 g packs of **Trident multigrain rice cakes** with a use-by date of August, September, October, November or December 2002, sold in the ACT, NSW and Queensland.
The problem: They're not gluten-free as claimed.
What to do: Don't eat them if you have coeliac disease. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund or call 1800 888 606.

THE PRODUCT: Maxim Housewares has recalled **Maxim NL-9085 Comfort Lights** sold by Bunnings stores in the eastern states of Australia and Cheap as Chips stores in SA.
The problem: If the light is knocked, live internal parts may be exposed and pose an electric shock hazard.
What to do: Don't use it. For a replacement, return it to: Maxim Housewares, Reply Paid No. 393, Mordiallloc 3195.

THE PRODUCT: Test Rite International (Australia) has recalled **Landia Architect swing-arm desk lamps** — model LA1012HG, fitted with a metal lamp holder and sold by Homeart stores as SKU 1496 from January to April 4, 2002.
The problem: It's an electric shock hazard.
What to do: Don't use it. Return it to Homeart for a refund or call 1800 501 735.

THE PRODUCT: Rebel Sport has recalled one **Air Hockey Table**, sold from Chapel Street, in Prahran, Victoria, on March 20, 2002.
The problem: The fan underneath isn't connected.
What to do: Don't attempt to hook up the fan yourself — return it to Rebel Sport Prahran for connection. For more information call 0414 888 507 or 0438 221 702.

THE PRODUCT: Aymtram (trading as Techno Scooters) has recalled **battery rechargers** — model F-1 Intellect charger, model JD-24V12AH and model MDF2400850N — sold from October 2001 to March 22, 2002, with Techno Scooters in NSW and Victoria and from GET auction rooms at Lakemba, NSW.
The problem: They're unmarked, unapproved and an electric shock hazard.
What to do: Don't use them. Call (02) 9249 3303 or 0419 225 131 to arrange an exchange or refund.

THE PRODUCT: Bonds Industries has recalled **Bonds Infants fleecy hooded jackets, sweat tops** and **overalls**, in sizes 00–2. The **sweat tops** are a colour-blocked style in combined colours of pale pink, bright pink, red, purple, aqua, navy, pale blue, denim blue and green, and were sold by Kmart from February to March 19, 2002, and Best and Less from March 1–19, 2002. The **jackets** and **overalls** are blue and pink and were sold by Big W from February to March 19, 2002.
The problem: The press-studs may come off and pose a choking hazard.
What to do: For a refund, call 1800 806 906 or return them to Bonds Industries, Reply Paid 74872, Wentworthville 2145.

THE PRODUCT: The Swan Brewery Company has recalled **Emu export cans of beer** in WA: 375 mL cans in 30-packs, with a date of 14 March 2002 and time code between 00:00 and 02:00 on the carton and base of each can.
The problem: It may contain cleaning solution.
What to do: Don't drink it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 672 248.

THE PRODUCT: Hyundai has recalled **Santa Fe** and **Trajet vehicles fitted with 2.7 L Delta engines**, and made from March 31, 2000, to February 28, 2001.
The problem: Crankshaft position sensors may cause engine stalling.
What to do: Contact a Hyundai dealer.

THE PRODUCT: Hyundai has recalled **Terracan vehicles fitted with 3.5 L engines**, and made from August 1, 2001, to January 21, 2002.
The problem: They're not labelled 'unleaded fuel use only'.
What to do: Contact a Hyundai dealer.

THE PRODUCT: The Warehouse Group (Australia) has recalled **cordless microphones with receivers** — stock code: EA0345 (under packaging), sold by Clints Crazy Bargains, Clints Warehouse, Silly Solly's, Solly's Warehouse and The Warehouse stores from March 2000 to April 4, 2002.
The problem: It doesn't meet the Australian Communications Authority's frequency standards.
What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call 1800 254 687.

THE PRODUCT: Green Valley Nutrition has recalled **Twin Lab Metabolic Enhancer — Ripped Fuel** (mahuang-free formula), in bottles of 120 capsules, all batches and expiry dates sold before April 4, 2002, in NSW and Victoria.
The problem: It isn't registered with the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and contains yohimbine, which isn't approved for use in Australia.
What to do: Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call 1800 779 990.

THE PRODUCT: Audi has recalled **A3** and **S3** model 2001/2002 vehicles fitted with antilock braking systems (VIN ranges start with 8L; check with your dealer whether yours is affected).
The problem: The ABS control unit may overheat.
What to do: Contact your Audi dealer.

THE PRODUCT: Cabots has recalled **Cabots Deck Clean Rapid**: a wood cleaner sold in 1 L and 4 L amounts before March 20, 2002.
The problem: Increased pressure in the container may cause leakage before or after it's opened.
What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for refund or call 1800 011 006.

Fernwood Fitness Centre Belconnen & Braddon

Would like to put a package together for the busy woman

You receive

- $59 per month (min 12 months)
- No joining fee

Think gyms are too expensive?

This one pays *you* to go, so no more excuses (at least not for busy women who live in Canberra).

34cm Colour TV

• 10 agitator action • 4 wash cycles • 3 water levels
• Auto lint disposal • Load sensing • Auto balancing

TV that agitates? Surely not ...

Why buy a TV *and* a washing machine when this 2-in-1 can do both jobs?

Full Length Mirror
Stick on.
ZHC741

Bargain Price
$14.95 EA

FULL-LENGTH FOR KIDS, MAYBE ...

All in all, this isn't a very convincing illustration of the mirror's supposed full-length capability.

Schick
The feel of SmartDesign
EXTRA II
FOR WOMEN + ALOE VERA

Know of any aloe vera looking for a razor?

This one's designed for it, as well as for women.

COMPLETE NONSENSE

If you slept in a bed without a mattress, or without bed linen for that matter, would you consider it 'complete'? We wouldn't and, frankly, we're struggling to understand what makes a bed complete without these apparently trifling accessories. All the other parts are there, perhaps? You don't have to race out and buy some bits of wood and some screws?

Perhaps 'complete bed frame' would be a more accurate description.

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Don't say you weren't warned!

Several Canberrans noticed this in the latest Yellow Pages.

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The Hard Word would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to R Gilchrist, I Passaris, G McAllister, K Nielsen, M Meredith, S Jackman, S Bardwell, E Raphael, E Ward, K Clark, P Cook, L Thomson, J Mangos and A Adam for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep sending them in.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.

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